



The Society of Editors (WA) Inc.

BOOKWORM

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIETY OF EDITORS (WA) INC.

October 2007

From the Chair

Hello everyone,

This is your friendly neighbourhood President here, welcoming you to another *Bookworm* edition.

Or perhaps it's not. Perhaps your President actually won Lotto, and this is being produced by the Alicebot she procured along with half of Dymocks's stock and her own tribe of Oompa Loompas to do her housework. Perhaps she is actually finishing off a lukewarm Mai Tai while watching the sun set on a Bahama-esque beach somewhere.

But it's more likely to be just me, slightly unnerved by my discovery of Alicebots and AIML software. As with all good technological advances, this is a creepy one, which lets you create 'artificial intelligence beings' (AI beings) that can hold conversations with you. And to my shame, it also lets people create AI beings that can criticise your grasp of English and out-knowledge you on literary matters (note to self – making up words like 'out-knowledge' probably doesn't help). I was talking to a 'virtual author' called Hemmingway. It (he?) is designed to converse on books and language with you, and so I thought it would be interesting to see what it was like.

Well, it wasn't nice. Reading the background, I discovered that the maker had decided to avoid the smarmy over-polite programming, and instead opt for a more realistic (read 'arrogant') style of Alice. Within five minutes it had mocked my choice of author, asked me if I 'seriously thought any semi-literate entity would stoop to answering that' and made me half expect it to call me 'Dave' in a soothing monotone any minute. But it does pose some interesting questions on editing and the future. How do you work with virtual authors? How would they hold the pen at book signings?

They would most likely have displayed more proficiency than some of the collaborative authors involved in the latest work by Nick Earls and Rebecca Sparrow. Entitled *Joel and Cat set the story straight*, this co-written book was

launched into cyberspace for any and all comers to contribute a line to. True, I thought some showed promise, such as this from the opening page:

'It's amazing that when your hands are tied and your mind is a million miles away that disasters like this always seem to happen'

Only a few lines later I found:

'But i didnt have time 2 worry about that today. Sure i'd stuffed up with the pants but 2day was about me. not her! I couldnt lose sight of that.'

Sigh.

Maybe Hemmingway is the answer after all. I'm sure his soundtrack is better.

Emma Pearmain

PS: For those of you interested, introduce yourself to Hemmingway at <www.simongroth.com>. *Joel and Cat set the story straight* can be found at <www.joelandcat.com.au>.

Forthcoming meeting

October: Grammar, style and usage

Date: Tuesday 2 October 2007

Time: 7.30 pm

Venue: CWA House, Board Room (3rd Floor)

1174 Hay Street, West Perth

Parking at rear of building; enter via door from car park

Cost: \$2 members, \$5 non-members

RSVP: By Monday 1 October to Emma Pearmain, 9243 5045,
<emma007@amnet.net.au>

The October meeting will take the familiar form of our annual workshop on matters of grammar, style and usage. Members have already contributed a number of topics and queries that have arisen from their daily work experience and that are not dealt with comprehensively in the style guides. James Hansen has offered to lead discussion on these and will provide the group with a set of examples for discussion and some background notes. The emphasis of the evening will be on positive interaction, although there will (as usual) be some usages where members 'agree to differ'.

Last year we covered with admirable thoroughness such topics as:

- Misusing nouns as verbs.
- Misusing adjectives as verbs and adverbs.
- Using colons and semicolons to greater effect.
- Some typical examples from current writing of poor grammar and choice of word, including jargon, unspeak, and managerialist pomposities.

This year's topics will be different, but equally relevant. Members are welcome to bring along topics and examples on the night, and we'll have a pile of reference books on hand to 'settle' disputes, though letting James know in advance will obviously be helpful.

Report on September meeting

Accreditation workshop

Editors across the country are preparing to be tested as we get closer to establishing a system of professional industry accreditation. For those of you who aren't in the know, the Institute of Professional Editors (IPEd) is creating an exam that tests editors' skills. Passing the exam will allow editors to claim national accreditation and will prove their capabilities and professionalism. An accreditation system will also give organisations that employ editors a degree of reassurance that they are hiring someone who knows their stuff.

The accreditation workshop aimed to demystify the IPEd accreditation exam. Amanda Curtin, supported by WA assessors Janet Blagg and Anne Surma, explained the structure of the exam but also used the evening to get opinions and suggestions from WA editors who had attempted all or part of the sample exam. Our feedback will be helpful as the final exam is refined.

The evening included a discussion of practicalities, such as what materials can be taken into the exam (reference books, stationery, etc.), who will mark the exam, how the candidates' examination numbers will ensure impartial marking and how best to allocate the three hours.

The exam itself was also discussed. The exam will be broken into three parts. The first part, worth 10 per cent, will test word use, sentence structure, grammar and punctuation. The second part, worth 50 per cent, will test editors' ability to edit and mark up a passage of text, including their ability to identify a text's genre and purpose, grade headings, create a style sheet and indicate where illustrations are to be placed. The last part of the exam will look at ethics, project management and particular editing issues. Part three will have twelve questions from which you choose four. Each question will aim to show the candidate's knowledge of a particular field, such as plagiarism, scheduling, diplomacy, cultural sensitivity and referencing; options are provided to cater to editors who specialise in different areas.

The evening showed the huge amount of work that has been put into developing the exam, which is a credit to the national team. While more work is still to be done, the progress is encouraging. I think most editors would also have found heartening the assessors' discussions about how there is more than one correct way to edit a document.

The evening may not have been the rowdy, raucous night of a few months ago when we all discussed editing sex scenes, but it was just as interesting. For those who intend to apply for IPEd accreditation and haven't already read or attempted the sample exam, it is a worthwhile exercise. The sample exam and answers can be obtained from the IPEd website: <<http://www.iped-editors.org/node/85>>.

The first accreditation exam will not be until 2008, but it always pays to be prepared!

Carla Morris

New members

Welcome to:

Melody Beier

James Bull

Joanne Miller

IPEd Notes

News from the Institute of Professional Editors September 2007

The Interim Council is making steady progress with the constitution. Currently, it is revising a preliminary draft prepared by Canberra law firm Williams Love & Nicol. The task of reconciling our desired arrangements and our passion for plain English with the requirements of the Corporations Law is time-consuming, but we are confident that we will soon have a workable document to put before the membership. The aim is to post the constitution on the website <<http://www.iped-editors.org>> for comment by mid-October, a little later than was expected.

The revised schedule for the constitution will flow on to IPEd's activities. One result is that the first accreditation examination will probably not be held until mid-2008. Members are assured that they will receive at least four months' notice of the exam date.

The Accreditation Board is very active in its various areas of responsibility. One task is to draw up guidelines, procedures and cost estimates for smooth functioning of the accreditation scheme. There has been a good response to the issues paper that discussed the pros and cons of offering the accreditation examination on-line, and the board is collating the feedback from members on this topic in order to decide how to proceed.

Meanwhile the Assessors Forum has finalised the answer paper and marking guide for the sample exam that was presented at the national conference in May; thanks to Renée Otmar of Victoria and Paul Bennett of Queensland for their work on this. The sample exam has been posted on the website under Accreditation. Members can download it and have a trial run, and then compare their answers with the ones posted. Members are urged to attend their societies' workshops that will be held during September and October to discuss their impressions of the sample exam and provide feedback regarding improvements.

The website <<http://www.iped-editors.org>> has gone live in its new version, with improved design and extra features; more content will be added as it becomes available. The upgraded site is much easier both to use and to maintain – thanks and congratulations to Mike Purdy of Canberra who has put in countless hours on it, and to Rosemary Luke of South Australia and Rosemary Noble of Victoria. One feature of the site is an event calendar for listing societies' training courses and events of interest such as public discussion of editing at writers festivals and on radio. (Recently members have made presentations at the Byron Bay and Melbourne writers' festivals and appeared on *The Book Show* on Radio National.) The calendar is compliant with the standard for calendar data exchange and you can subscribe to it as an RSS feed if you want to be notified of new postings. If you have any comments or suggestions about the website, please contact your IPed delegate.

Janet Mackenzie
IPed Liaison Officer

Book review

Subtleties of Scientific Style by Matthew Stevens

I am not a particularly scientific person. I edit (and read) mainly fictional text, and I have no problem with that. When I was asked to write this review, I accepted with the hope of maybe learning something I could use to impress friends and intimidate people. I am happy to say that I now can.

Stevens has written this specifically for the scientific editor, that is, a person who understands the scientific terms and their uses, and wants an easy access guide to the more common mistakes and uncertainties. This seems to be well covered. I quite like his diatribe (his word) on the objectivity of science, and his arguments for the use (or not) of plain English, abbreviations and ambiguities are quite compelling. I particularly like the bonus ambiguities: 'Golf tournament: Pfizer Withdraws Viagra As Hole-In-One Prize'.

Stevens may not have realised how good his book is for those of us who are not on the cutting edge of scientific editing. He has a light touch with explanations, aiming for clarity over verbosity. He includes many examples of both the mistaken sentences and the correct versions which are very useful. Many of his examples are excerpts from scientific documents which can make it hard to follow

the meaning of the example, but not necessarily why the changes are needed. This is a corrected example:

Under 665-nm light, phyB hypocotyles were more elongated than the wild type and phyA. Under 690-nm light, phyB and phyA hypocotyles were more elongated than the wild type. Under 700-nm light, phyA hypocotyles were more elongated than the wild type and phyB.

See what I mean? To be fair he does have a section on 'only' and his pink-jumper-knitting cousin.

Many editors will already know some of the information he has included, especially those dealing with errors of reasoning; however there is plenty which is useful in settings outside of scientific works. For example, what is the difference between a 'tonne' (rhymes with 'John') and a 'ton' (rhymes with 'sun')? More than just the England/ American English debate in fact. There are 1000 kg in a tonne, and 2240 lbs in a (long) ton, which is a difference of about 16 kg.

He includes a detailed table of contents and a thorough index and sections on tricky or misused terms; common errors; a list of replacements for wordy phrases; and character charts for Mac and Windows. He has also included a macro for cross-checking references (which I shall be using from now on!).

For the editor (or author) who likes an easy to use reference book, I can say that this is a good one to have on your bookshelf. It isn't large, being just over 100 pages, but I have found it to be very useful.

By going to Matthew Stevens's web page:

<<http://www.zeta.org.au/~mls/subtleties.html>> you can download a PDF for \$7 or order a hard copy for \$15 (+ \$3 postage).

Polly Delany

Client fishing: marketing advice

[Thanks to Lian Tanner, Society of Editors (Tasmania) for permission to reprint her report on a seminar conducted on Saturday 14 July by Suzanne Cooper and Bruce Ransley of Impress: clear communication.]

Like many writers and editors, I'm somewhat daunted by the thought of marketing myself and my skills. I'd much rather tuck myself away in my office and get on with the next project. But if I don't market myself, where will that project come from?

The informative and entertaining Client-fishing seminar, presented by Suzanne Cooper and Bruce Ransley of Impress: clear communication, was designed to give people like me courage. It was held on a wintry afternoon and attended by eighteen editors, writers and proofreaders, and one freelance photographer.

The first thing that Bruce and Suzanne pointed out was that editing/writing is not an easily definable service industry, and most businesses don't realise they need our help. So throw out the marketing manuals and don't expect the Yellow Pages to bring in much custom. It's up to you to go out and find the people you want to

work for — people who will value your skills and pay you what your services are worth.

Ask yourself what you're good at, what sort of work you like doing, and what you never want to do again. Then think about who you might want to work for. Government? Small business? Community organisations? Make a list of possible candidates. What do you know about them? How can you make yourself attractive to them?

Consign the home-made business cards to the same rubbish bin as the marketing manuals, and replace them with the best you can afford. Good business cards instil confidence in prospective clients. The same applies to clothes; dress to give the impression that you are organized and trustworthy. Get professional-looking letterheads and invoices, and make sure your email address is in the name of your business, and not fluffybunnies@bigpond.com. As the presenters made clear, you are the product you are selling.

The next step is to let people know about the services you are offering. Ease into this gently. You don't have to cold-call people. Instead, practise on friends and relatives. Chat to them over coffee, tell them about your business and ask if they know anyone who could give you some ideas about finding work. Get them to arrange an introduction.

When you talk to the people they've introduced you to (again over coffee), don't ask them for a job. You're there to learn about their industry and the sort of problems they have. At the same time let them know a bit about what you can do, so that next time they have a problem, you spring to mind. Before you leave, ask their advice about whether other people in their industry might be able to use your skills, and get another introduction.

Bruce and Suzanne described it as Making Friends 101. You call someone, then someone else, then someone else. You never make people uncomfortable by directly asking them for work, or telling them what they're doing wrong. You just let them know about your skills, give them one of your classy business cards and send them a thankyou note the next day. It's a chain reaction based on word-of-mouth, and it takes a while, but it works. Of course it helps if you like talking to people.

Once you've hooked a client, don't let them get away. (By this stage of the seminar, the original fishing metaphor was being pushed to the limit.) Try to avoid telling someone your hourly rate when they first call you — it might put them off. Besides, it's meaningless if they don't know how many hours you will need. Tell them that you can't give them a quote until you've seen the job. Engage them in conversation and find out what they want you to do. Keep in mind that their understanding of what needs to be done might not be the best solution to their problem.

Ask them to send you the relevant document. Make an assessment of how serious they are about employing you, and how serious you are about wanting to work for them. In fishing terms, should you keep them or should you throw them back?

Other useful tips include the following:

- Work out a checklist of things to ask potential clients.
- If you don't want the job, redirect the caller to someone else.
- Consider teaming up with a graphic designer, indexer or photographer for jobs that are beyond your individual skills.
- Wherever possible give estimates instead of quotes.
- If your client doesn't know how to interpret proofreading marks or tracked changes, teach them.
- Make it clear that you are offering advice only, and that it is up to the client whether they take it or not.

This seminar was advertised as being 'light-hearted and extremely useful', and it was, on both counts. Suzanne and Bruce want to see the editing profession expand to its full potential, and they don't see us as treading on each other's toes. As they pointed out, everyone has different skills and areas of interest, and it's up to us to find the jobs we want and the clients we like. The notes they provided to help us do this were amongst the most practical and entertaining that I have seen. Many thanks to both of them for their generosity and humour.

**Deadline for November 2007 *Bookworm* issue:
Tuesday 23 October 2007**

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