The Canberra editor

President's report

We're almost at the end of another year, and the Canberra Society of Editors is seeing this year off with a fine dinner at Pistachio. I hope you can all make it, even if only to catch up with old friends and make some new ones, and to be inspired by Iain MacCalman and Kate Fullagar. These two will be speaking to us about the challenges of editing a book they really cared about.

Your committee has been busy preparing for next year. The training program is already looking exciting, with courses on design, copy-editing and one on 'editing essentials'. The training committee is always on the lookout for ways to deliver the training you need, so please get in touch with Martin Holmes if there are some skills you want to develop. The chances are that if you need further training, then someone else will too.

In his new role as IPEd delegate, Ted's first task is to clarify the relationship between the Canberra Society of Editors and IPEd, and how we can have some input into the general design of the accreditation exam and other national matters. If you have strong views on this, then now is the time to contact Ted so he can pass them on.

Finally, enjoy a good rest during what is forecast to be a hot Christmas season. Hot days are few and far between in Canberra, and they deserve to be celebrated with cold drinks, good food, friends and family, and long swims.

Committee highlights

Training: The first professional development courses for 2010 are a Word 2003 template building course in the morning, and a design course from David Whitbread in the afternoon. They are likely to be on a Saturday in February but we haven't set a date yet. In late March, Helen Topor will deliver an *Editing Essentials* workshop.

General meetings: Possible speakers are Professor Ann Scott, who recently published a book on the life of Sir Ernest Gowers, her grand-father, and Dr Neil James. Whom do you want to hear? Tell us.

Publications: Moves are afoot to publish a book of Elizabeth Murphy's newsletter articles. Ted Briggs is managing that.

The newsletter is to be published earlier each month. After extensive discussion, we agreed to retain the existing masthead and logo.

IPEd Notes

What do editors want?

Following the IPEd plenary session at the national conference in Adelaide in October 2009, participants were asked to prioritise and comment on seven activities (detailed in the analysis below) that had been identified by the IPEd Council as areas of potential activity for the Institute. The activities were listed on a form headed 'What do editors want?' that respondents (there were 56) completed and dropped into the IPEd suggestion box at the conference desk.

Thanks are due to Rosemary Noble, the IPEd Councillor for the Society of Editors (Victoria), for the following analysis of responses.

A significant number of respondents urged IPEd to:

• find ways to ensure IPEd can act like a peak body (standardise membership criteria across the societies; involve the state societies more, work on getting a secure financial base, concentrate on just a few activities)

• get the accreditation scheme bedded down and develop the next portfolio stage (specific suggestions to the Accreditation Board included holding just one exam in one venue biennially).

In order of priority, the other activities identified were as follows (additional comments pertaining to those activities are shown in brackets):

1. Engaging in marketing, communications and promotion of editing (including promoting to corporations, businesses and agencies; providing an IPEd lapel badge for all editor society members; starting up a national e-newsletter; promoting a members' blog on the website)

2. Coordinating professional development opportunities (including national mentoring system, recognising other pathways to success besides accreditation, developing a national register of training people and courses)

3. Continue to develop standards (including making sure the *Australian Standards for Editing Practice* are up to date and inclusive of new technologies and areas of specialist interest)

The above three priorities ranked quite a bit higher than the following:

4. Establishing a national register of accredited editors

5. Accrediting tertiary courses

6. Providing employment brokerage information (some not sure what this meant; insurance deals; pay scales; developing templates for freelancers)

7. Fostering relationships with other like-minded groups— editors, writers, publishers, indexers, illustrators etc.

Other potential activities mentioned by just one or two delegates were:

• taking over the production of the next edition of the *Style Manual*

• developing awards and scholarships

• fostering special-interest groups.

The IPEd Council thanks all respondents for their contributions, which will inform its planning in the year ahead and beyond. To all editors and their families and friends, it extends its best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

Ed Highley
IPEd Secretary

English alive: subject–comma–verb

Did you know that inserting a single comma between a subject and its verb could help land you in jail? Forensic linguist John Olsson found a consistent use of subject–comma–verb (SCV) among samples of a suspect's writing. For example:

> Neither would have known that Joe, was to enter hospital to have tests to prove that he is and was impotent.

This distinctive use of SCV – which Olsson calls 'disordering structure' – matched a piece of writing being held by police as evidence and hence helped to build a case against the suspect.

Of course this match would only have been significant if SCV were idiosyncratic. I find that it is becoming less and less so – as some of Olsson's own sentences indicate:

> The tactic of attempting to discredit female victims of sexual harassment or other attacks, is well known to include claims that the victim or alleged victim suffers from some form of premenstrual or other syndrome.

I first noticed the SCV phenomenon in 2002 when my boss at the time, the owner of a small publishing business, asked me to proofread a PhD thesis. The author of this document, a psychologist, consistently inserted a comma between the subject and its verb:

> My research, is a mixed method study.

Being under the influence of a psychology treatise, I hypothesised that SCV might reflect a hesitancy to act. However, as the practice became more and more common, I thought that it might indicate a widespread feeling of powerlessness:

> Figure 2, shows the comparative number of incidents at each airport.

> Ann Onymous, is alleged to have provided the terrorist group with funding.

> It is recommended that the committee, develop and implement a strategy to ensure that the agency is supported by appropriately qualified information technology specialists.

> The base is converted into a powder which, is processed into capsules.

From a linguistic perspective, the most common cause of the SCV transgression is a lengthy subject phrase:

> National planning for future resource allocation to the region, should take into account the increasing pressures on the agency in Queensland.

> The resumption of Japanese commercial whaling operations and aggressive pursuit of the fleet by the vessels of anti-whaling activists, received worldwide media attention.

> The perception that tax evasion is not a serious criminal offence and is difficult for authorities to detect, could be altered over time.

I began this article by saying that inserting a single comma between a subject and its verb could help land you in jail. A pair of commas, on the other hand, is perfectly legitimate:

> The house, which has been painted lime-green, is an old timber dwelling.

> A check of state managers, for example, indicated that the people working there have limited credentials for this sort of industry.

In instances like these, authors sometimes forget to insert the first comma:

> The mission mandate and threats to national interests in particular, reinforce the need for proper management.

> Objects that were once valuable such as precious stones, may lose value if abundant resources become scarce.

Is this an inadvertent omission of the first comma or another case of SCV syndrome? It seems that many contemporary writers know that the comma – like its superscript cousin, the apostrophe – should go somewhere but are not sure where.

Anne Reed

References

John Olsson, *Word crime: solving crime through forensic linguistics*, Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., London, 2009.

David Whitbread's *Design manual* uses spaced en rules rather than em rules. Anne does here. Should this newsletter do so or stay with the *Style manual*? Tell us what you think. *Editor*

Letter to the editor

Something that gets my goat these days is everyone, but EVERYONE is calling men 'gentlemen'.

 'A gentleman in a balaclava robbed the bank.'

The media does it, the politicians do it and writers do it. It was bad enough when people kept using the word 'guy' but 'gentleman' is far, far worse. I would be much happier if they used the word 'man'. I would even prefer 'bloke' which is a healthy version. Have we become so depraved we don't know what the word 'gentleman' means or how to use it? I'm sure the answer is yes.

Best wishes,

Patricia Stone

Nuts and bolts … Whither grammar and plain English?

Someone asked me, a couple of months ago, what I thought about the future of plain English. Well, as this is my last regular article for *The Canberra Editor*, I would like to spend some time talking about the future of grammar and the future of plain English. This is sheer crystal ball gazing, and may not coincide with your opinion of where we're heading.

English is a living language because we are all different, we have different needs, we use our language for different purposes, and we are of different generations. Some of us are very comfortable with new technology. Some aren't. I suggest that, if we are to continue to communicate meaningfully with each other, we need to recognise the changing nature of language, and the changing nature of technology—at the same time.

This quote is relevant, believe it or not:

> Ye know ek that in forme of speche is chaunge
> Withinne a thousand yeer, and wordes tho
> That hadden pris, now wonder nyce and straunge
> Us thinketh hem, and yet thei spake hem so …

<p align="right">Geoffrey Chaucer: Troilus and Criseyde, Book II, c 1385</p>

What he's saying, in essence, is that language changes and words that used to be valued highly for a particular meaning can appear strange at a later time. We still sometimes think using certain words in our mind, but others use new words to mean the same thing. And words change meaning over time.

How true! Just one example: 'gay'—how that word has changed meaning in just one generation!

I take particular note of what Chaucer writes—after all, he is my Uncle Geoffrey. Cross my heart!

Recently, I decided to get out of the dinosaur ranks of some of my generation and come to grips with the technology that I'd been avoiding. The upshot is that I am now fairly comfortable with texting and receiving text messages on my mobile phone; with overcoming my lack of navigational skill by investing in a GPS and trusting it to get me where I need to go; and with learning how to make the best use of a smart flashdrive so that I can sling it round my neck and cart just about everything from my home PC around the world. This pre-Baby Boomer dinosaur has got catapulted into modern communication technology.

So what's all this got to do with the future of grammar and plain English? Heaps. English is a living language, just as technology is alive. The English language changes all the time, with new words added, old words dropped, words imported from new industries and from a huge range of other languages. On top of that, the so-called 'rules' of grammar change as people speak English differently from the way their parents and grandparents spoke it. When I was at school, we had to write 'different from', for example. Before long, it became OK to write 'different to'. So far, 'different than' has been resisted in formal writing, but it will come. Usage in writing always follows usage in speech—it's only a matter of time before 'different than' will be perfectly acceptable in writing as well as in speech.

The jargon of the IT industry is becoming part of everyday speech and writing. Who would have thought, a few short years ago that 'text' could be a verb as well as a noun?

The term 'plain English' might seem to many to date from some time in the 1980s. Not a bit of it! Here's another quote:

> The first requisite of a perfect sentence is Clearness. Whatever leaves the mind in any sort of suspense as to the meaning, ought to be avoided. Obscurity arises from two causes; either from a wrong choice of words, or a wrong arrangement of them.

<p align="right">Lindley Murray, English Grammar, 1804 (1st ed. 1795)</p>

Nothing new under the sun, is there? Murray is describing exactly what we call 'plain English' today.

Without going into detail, plain English includes:

- controlling sentence length
- choosing everyday words over pompous words
- preferring active verbs over passive verbs as far as practicable
- using dynamic verbs rather than 'dead' verbal nouns
- being positive, avoiding foreign or jargon terms, being game to use personal pronouns and not get bogged down in third person writing.

And it's not just the words. However well constructed a piece of writing is, it will fall flat on its face if it *looks* unreadable, so we need:

- plenty of white space
- variety of paragraph lengths
- type that's easy to read
- as few frills as possible, particularly in business writing.

And the content needs to be relevant to the topic and the audience, the language needs to be meaningful to the age group we're writing for, and pages that are nothing but 'a sea of black ink' are to be avoided.

Whither grammar and plain English?

Sound grammar is the basis of all good writing and always will be. I don't believe the basic patterns of English grammar will change much in the future—they may get bent a little to accommodate 'mobile-speak', but they will always have to be patterns that every speaker of English recognises and can respond to. Plain English is based on sound grammar and is getting plainer all the time. It is tending towards telegraphic English in some instances, and here we need to exercise care. Whatever is written to remain on any sort of record needs to be understandable both today and in the future. Even the quote from Chaucer above is reasonably understandable by today's speakers of English, and follows pretty much the same grammatical patterns that we observe today. As writers and editors we need to think of who we are writing for and why we are writing. We always will. I believe English grammar, pretty much as we know it, is with us for the long haul, and plain English will be around for as long as business people need to read clear reports without having to re-read obscure passages—they don't have time for re-reading.

***

I have been writing articles for *The Canberra Editor* for eight years on a regular basis, and I've had heaps of fun doing so. I have decided that the time has come to stop writing to deadlines, so this is the last of these series. In future, I'll write occasional articles, and already have requests to write about some special aspects of writing and editing. Thank you for the kind comments over the years—I'll be back, but when you least expect me! I'm heading for a white Christmas this year—enjoy your summer holidays.

As a famous Australian broadcaster on the BBC (Wilfred Thomas) used to say, at the end of every broadcast: 'Thank you for having me at your place'. I echo that sentiment—CU L8R, fellow editors and friends.

Elizabeth Manning Murphy

<emmurphy@ozemail.com.au>

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Murphy, Elizabeth M (1989) *Effective writing: plain English at work*, Pitman, Melbourne (copies available from the author).

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A romantic companion: the tale of a life-changing edition

In mid-1996 four people stood around a fax machine in the ANU's Humanities Research Centre watching numbly as it spewed countless pages onto the floor.

Professor Iain MacCalman was asked to be general editor of what was to be a work of 450,000 words; his editorial assistant was a brilliant but very young and recently graduated BA with no editing experience—Kate Fullagar.

The *Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture, 1776–1832* has become a classic in its field, transforming Romantic studies. The *Times Higher Educational Supplement* hailed its appearance as 'a publishing event… an outstanding book of reference'. Peter Conrad in *The Australian Review of Books* claimed that it 'redefined the whole cultural field'.

Iain and Kate will tell you about some of the dramas, challenges, hardships, possibilities and delights that accompanied the editing of a book that changed their lives in fundamental ways.

Where?	**Pistachio Dining** Shop 3A, Torrens Place, Torrens
When?	**Wednesday 25 November** 6.00 for 6.30 pm
Why?	**Annual end-of-year dinner**
How?	You must book and pre-pay with:
Who?	**Bree Winchester** **bree@couchcreative.com.au** **04 04 85 69 25 (0404 856 925)** before 23 November

Committee highlights *(from page 1)*

About IPEd back in October

We discussed the accreditation exam process and status. For example, one issue raised was whether assessment is concentrating on copy-editing for speed rather than for meaning. We agreed improvements were required and that to achieve this there needed to be a comprehensive analysis of the results to date. Cathy proposed a separate meeting with Ted to collate members' views and pass these on to IPEd.

About IPEd in November

Ted mentioned that he believed that IPEd intended to provide some analysis of the accreditation exam results. The next council meeting he will attend is on 22 November. He is now the IPEd treasurer.

Thinking about words – cold comfort

I celebrated the onset of summer by catching a beastly cold—a *common* cold. I'd say that I had spring fever, but … Well, never mind! My encyclopaedia informs me brightly that 'more than 100 agents cause the common cold … rhinoviruses, however, are the most frequent cause.' *Rhinoviruses* sound intimidating, but have nothing to do with that large African mammal—*rhino-* is simply Greek for nose (the *-ceros* is the creature's horn). When we have a cold we may *feel* cold, but colds are not caused by being exposed to or feeling cold—they are given to us by somebody spraying us with droplets containing the virus. While it was no comfort to realise that it was only *common* germs causing my cold, I inevitably found myself thinking about the words we use when we talk about this familiar complaint.

English is usually described as a Germanic language, although roughly half our vocabulary is from Romance roots, related to French, Italian, Spanish and so on, and in turn back to Latin. Our colds are certainly linguistically closer to German—a cold in German is *eine erkältung* and to catch one is *sich erkälten*, whereas in French we would have *un rhume*, and catching it would be *s'enrhumer* (or *attraper un rhume*). The old English word *rheum* is close to the French; with its meaning of 'catarrh' it is invariably associated with our cold. It comes from a Greek word meaning 'to flow', and highlights one of our more tiresome symptoms. Another related word is *phlegm*, also these days meaning catarrh, although no one would confuse *phlegmatic*—calm and unemotional—with *rheumatic* in its modern usage! Both words originally meant 'producing a watery discharge'. That word *catarrh* is also from the Greek, related to *cataract* and also having the sense of 'flowing down', which it does profusely at times.

A Greek doctor, Galen (CE 129–216), theorised that phlegm was one of the four basic body fluids ('humours')—blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile—that determine our temperament and our intellectual and physical qualities. Ideally you had these four humours in equal amounts, but an excess of one or the other could make you sanguine (Latin *sanguis*, 'blood'), phlegmatic, melancholic, or hot-tempered. Indeed, the word *melancholy* comes from the Greek words *melan-* meaning 'black' (as in our words 'melanin' or 'melanoma') and *chole*, 'bile'. If you were ill, it might be due to an imbalance in your humours. Far-fetched or not, Galen's theories influenced European medicine for the next 1400 years.

The word 'influence' may also be linked with colds. *Influenza* is simply Italian for 'influence', and when any epidemic swept through Italy in the Middle Ages it was assumed to be due to some supernatural influence, perhaps of the stars (*influenza degli astri*) or maybe divine retribution. A particularly dreadful flu epidemic raged in Italy and across Europe in 1504, and while the Italians gave it their generic name for an epidemic, in many countries this name *influenza* became attached to the specific illness. French dictionaries still include the term *influenza*, which they took from the Italians via the English in the 18th century, but nowadays they more often call it *la grippe*, from the verb *gripper*, 'to seize' (well, when the real flu strikes you it grips you good and hard). The Germans have borrowed the French term, so that the recent outbreak of 'swine flu' is reported in those countries as *Schweinegrippe* or *grippe porcine*, but Italians remain true to their history and call it *influenza suina.*

However, swine flu (officially 'Influenza A H1N1') is no longer just an epidemic, according to the World Health Organisation, but a pandemic. *Epidemic* in Greek means 'upon the people' (perhaps localised to a particular region)—the *-demic*, 'people', coming from the same root as democracy or demographic—but that '*pan-*' pushes it out to '*all* the people', worldwide. And worldwide, the death total from H1N1 flu was 5700 on 25 October, at the time of writing, an increase of 700 in the previous seven days. At that time, Australia had 186 deaths out of at least 37,000 cases of H1N1 flu. In the ACT, we've had 940 of those cases and two deaths since the outbreak began. These seem horrid figures, but need to be put in perspective: on average, 2500–3000 Australians die every year from 'normal' seasonal influenza—swine flu is highly contagious but not particularly severe.

If viruses cause colds and flu, what are they? They are just bits of genetic stuff, DNA or RNA, that cannot multiply outside their host cells. Commercial vaccine production generally uses hens' eggs to provide the necessary host cells for growth, and this is how our Australian vaccines have been made. Latin *virus* means 'slimy liquid or poison', and its earliest use in English was in the sense of venom, possibly verbal. Thus, in 1599, 'You have spit out all the virus and poyson you could conceive, in the abuse of his person'. Scientific work on viruses began in the late 19th century, and the OED's first citation using the term in this sense is from the French scientist Louis Pasteur in 1880 (*virus* works very well in French and German too).

Are you one of the minority who has already had your free swine flu vaccination? The word *vaccine* has its own story. Edward Jenner (1749–1823) was a country surgeon in Gloucestershire at a time when smallpox, *variola*, was rife, very often causing disfiguration or death. Attempts had been made from the early 18th century to immunise against smallpox by deliberately inoculating people with the 'matter' taken from patients who had a mild attack, but this frequently failed or went horribly wrong. However, Jenner noticed that people working with cattle seemed to be immune, and one day in May 1796 he was told by a milkmaid, Sarah Nelmes, that she had caught the 'cowpox' from the spots on an infected cow's udders and therefore would never get smallpox. He took some of the matter from a pustule on her hand (one of the *pocks*, from which the term *pox* derives) and injected it into a healthy eight-year-old boy, who promptly developed mild cowpox and recovered within ten days. A few weeks later he re-injected the boy with smallpox matter, and no disease followed. That experiment laid the foundation for all subsequent vaccination, named after the Latin *vacca*, a cow (the medical term for cowpox was *variola vaccinae)*, although Jenner himself referred to vaccination as *inoculation*, a term originally used when grafting plants—you are putting the *oculus*, the 'eye' or bud, into the new host plant.

And so this atrabilious* piece ends after all on an upward note. And my good wishes for Christmas and the New Year—may you be free from colds for many seasons to come or, if that's too much to hope, may they never be worse than *common*.

Peter Judge

*atrabilious—affected by the black bile, melancholy

Sources

Oxford English Dictionary Second Edition on CD-ROM (v. 4.0), OUP, 2009.

Encyclopædia Britannica 2009 Ultimate Reference Suite on CD.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2009_flu_pandemic_in_Australia>. Image adapted from <www.csc.gov.sg/HTML/Newsletter/jul2006/julypictures/cold.jpg>. Various language dictionaries and sundry websites.

An anonymous benefactor?

Someone made a direct deposit of $60 to the CSE account on 22 September from a NETBANK account without telling us who they were. **Was it you?** If so, please contact the treasurer.

Indexing workshop:
a fitting finale for the 2009 professional development program

Barry Howarth, a Canberra award-winning indexer, presented the final workshop of the year, *Preparing and Editing Indexes*, held on 23 October 2009. It attracted ten participants; all were CSE members.

There was a lot of discussion and sharing of pooled knowledge throughout this workshop. The following are some points made by Barry during the workshop.

In his introduction Barry described indexing as a very individual process, more of an art than a science, and advised that no two indexers index the same way. He claims that the mark of a really good indexer is to get a joke into the index!

Barry began by posing two basic questions: what is an index and what does an indexer do?

Put simply, an index is a finding-aid. The job of the indexer is to provide access points to the information in a book or document. These access points present the contents of the book as accurately and comprehensively as time and space will allow, and anticipate where readers might look in order to find the information they are after.

This workshop dealt with book indexing but there are many different types of indexing, some of which require specialised skills of indexers. This is why it is important for the indexer to feel competent to deal with the subject matter of the book and any specific requirements from the author, editor or publisher before accepting the commission. Types of indexing include bibliographic and database indexing, genealogical indexing, geographical indexing, book indexing, legal indexing, pictorial indexing, website and metadata indexing.

Ideally, the first step in the indexing process involves the indexer reading the book at least once before starting the index. If not already specified by the commissioning agent, it is at this point that the indexer decides on the lay-out of the index.

Basically, there are two type of index layout: run-in and set-out or indented. Publishers prefer the latter as it saves space and can be cheaper; and indexers prefer the former as it shows a clear hierarchy and permits the use of sub-subheadings to further refine the index. In addition to index layout Barry covered the elements of an index entry and index styles.

The indexer must work on the final page proofs. The editor, author or publisher should inform the indexer of any further changes to the text or layout. The indexer will need to correct the index or possibly redo it; this will increase the cost of the work considerably.

Indexers have three indexing software programs available to assist them with their work and most indexers use one of these. They are: Cindex (for Mac and Windows), Macrex (for Windows) and Sky Index (for Windows). These programs do not perform the indexing but they allow the indexer more flexibility with sorting, layout, checking and editing of the index.

Other topics covered by Barry included editing the index, locators, criteria for registration with the Australian and New Zealand Society of Indexers and how to find an indexer.

The afternoon session involved participants doing two indexing exercises: reading and note making for the indexing of *Proust and French history* and accessing the extract from the index of Joanna Richardson, *Baudelaire: a biography*, using the criteria for registration of indexers.

Barry kindly prepared folders for each participant comprising comprehensive handouts including a suggested reading list.

Evaluations of this workshop were very positive. Participants wrote:

> *great anecdotes that provided good example, and stimulated discussion*

> *excellent presentation from a very experienced practitioner, patiently answered our questions*

> *best thing about these workshops is the 'pooled knowledge' —others' ideas, suggestions, practical experience being shared.*

A big thank you to Barry and the workshop participants.

Finally, thank you to all who supported the 2009 professional development program.

Martine Taylor

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The Canberra Editor

January 2010 newsletter

The copy deadlines for the next newsletters are Friday 9 January and Friday 5 February. Please email your contributions to <Gil.Garcon@ato.gov.au> and <Cupertino@lizzy.com.au> with your phone number.