The Canberra editor

Next meeting

29 September 6pm

Brindabella Room
National Library

Ian Davis, Chief Executive of Canberra-based publishing company National Publishers, will join us at our September general meeting to provide a unique insight into the use of government information for private industry and industry associations.

Ian is the former Government Business Editor of *The Australian Financial Review* and former News Editor of *The Canberra Times*. In his current role, Ian specialises in locating difficult-to-find information on government regulatory matters—especially superannuation, financial services, taxation and accounting—and communicating this information in simple, accurate non-specialist language.

We will go out for a light dinner after the meeting. Please feel free to join us.

40 years at the Australian National Botanic Gardens

Stephen Speer, Assistant Director of Visitor Services at the Australian National Botanic Gardens, generously sat through our AGM so that he could give us a great talk and fascinating pictorial history of the Gardens.

The Australian National Botanic Gardens are about to celebrate their 40th birthday, dated from the official opening presided over by then-PM John Gorton, but they are actually much older. In 1933 an advisory council proposed a botanic gardens with a scientific basis rather than for ornamental purposes, and although work on the site didn't start until after the war, on 12 September 1949 ceremonial trees (a eucalypt, which is still there, and an oak tree which has since died) were planted by then-PM Ben Chifley and the Director of Kew Gardens.

In September 1967 the 'Canberra Botanic Gardens' were opened to the public for the first time; the name was changed to 'National Botanic Gardens' in 1978 and finally to the slightly cumbersome 'Australian National Botanic Gardens' in 1984.

Stephen spoke about the uniqueness of the Gardens: there are no roses or carnations, or any exotics. Instead, there are 6300 species of Australian native plants (about a third of all Australian species), 1,110,000 specimens in the Herbarium, and 44,000 photos in the collection. There is a 1.4-kilometre main walking trail plus too many minor paths and tracks to fit on the map, and you can visit rainforests originating from Cape York to Tasmania in the Rainforest Gully.

The 40th anniversary activities include a birthday celebration on Wednesday 20 October, a Gala dinner on Friday 22 October and an Open Day garden party on Sunday 24 October. There will also be an exhibition, running from 1 October to 1 December, including a history of the gardens and stories from the community.

The future includes the goal to end the Gardens' placement as Canberra's 'best kept secret'. With new directional and information signage, a brand and logo refresh and a new website, hopefully many more locals and visitors will discover Australia's native landscape in the International Year of Biodiversity.

Natalie Maddalena

Reviews: Have your say

Editing standards: A revised draft of the Australian standards for editing practice is now available. We'll be emailing a copy to all members for comment. Please do take the time to read through it and send your opinions to Ted Briggs at <tedbriggs@grapevine.com.au>

The website <www.editorscanberra.org>: It's finally here – the start of a new look for the Canberra Society of Editors. We are now looking for your feedback as the site develops. What features would you like to see? Would you use a members' forum? You can use the contact form on the site to send in your ideas.

Training news:

Report: 'Design for non-designers'

Your committee

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Dallas Stow
Damaris Wilson

On Saturday 11 September, eleven members plus Evelyn Nicoll (who will doubtless be a member within the decade) attended a full-day course given by David Whitbread, titled 'Design for non-designers'. David has given similar courses before to the Canberra Society of Editors, and the demand for his courses seems to regenerate like flowering bulbs in spring.

The course started with a discussion of the concepts of good design. David said that designers are not artists. Their task is to attract attention to the publication and make the design elements blend with the text.

Next came an exposition on typefaces, of which there are more than 16 million (some dating from the 1500s) and counting. David discussed the difference between legibility and readability and played a trick on attendees to show that amazingly, what is not legible can be readable – however, the best bet is to strive for readability. Perhaps sadly, Times New Roman and Arial will not disappear soon; they have been used so often as to now be anonymous.

Anonymous + ubiquitous = continuous

We covered the use of imagery, design briefings and design for the web. David successfully modified the content of the course so that he satisfied every attendee's most secret desire for knowledge on design.

Next course: Structural editing

Pamela Hewitt
Friday 8 October 2010, 9.00–4.00
Members $150 Non-members $250
'Drawing Room' University House, ANU

There are still a few places available for this popular course.

The workshop puts structural work in context and makes practical suggestions for approaching the task.

Structural editing involves developing the logic and flow of a piece of writing, shaping and presenting the text in harmony with its internal progression. Editors almost always do it to some degree and the process is often intuitive.

Whatever the writing technique, there is a relationship between good writing and clear thinking. First, you need to understand the author's intentions, then to assess how well these aims are achieved. You're looking for the underlying logic to match the shape of the text. If there are gaps or imbalances, what can be done?

Topics to be covered include: Why structural editing is important; the characteristics of a structural editor; the process—examination, diagnosis and treatment; broad brush techniques; fine tuning; and factors to bear in mind.

Bookings: Martin Holmes, <martin.holmes-forte@bigpond.com>, 6255 8142 or 0431 268 948
Bookings are finalised by payment of the course fee. Electronic funds transfer to:
Canberra Society of Editors, Community CPS Australia, BSB 805 022, account 0342 3503.

New venue for September

The Canberra Society of Editors will meet in the **Brindabella Room** at the National Library of Australia.

You will need to take the lifts to the fourth floor. When you come out of the lift, turn left and the Brindabella Room should be in sight.

Can you format a Word document?

Our newsletter needs someone who can do the formatting. Some people call this 'typesetting', some call it 'layout'. This newsletter was prepared in MS Word, because that is the software we have.

If you can help, or if you want to learn, then here is your chance. Contact your president and you can get started!

What is a sentence?

Apart from what the judge hands down at a criminal trial – a death sentence or a month of community service – a sentence is a string of words that makes sense on its own. Grammatically, it has a subject and a predicate – the subject is what we want to talk about, and the predicate is what we want to say about the subject. It starts with a capital letter and ends with a full stop or some other form of end punctuation, such as a question mark or an exclamation mark.

If two sentences are really closely related, you can even use just a semicolon at the end of the first one and carry on with a small letter at the beginning of the second one. Let's look at a few sentences:

- *Birds fly.* This is a pretty basic sentence: *birds* is the subject and *fly* is the predicate. The predicate can be as short as this or quite long, but it must contain a complete (finite) verb—either an action verb as here or a being verb as in the next example.
- *Robin is a boy.* Here the subject is *Robin* and the predicate is *is a boy*, containing the being verb is and some extra words saying just what Robin is—a boy (this is known as the complement: a being verb cannot have an object because there is no action involved).
- *John kicked the ball to the boy in the green shirt.* The subject is *John* and the rest of the sentence is the predicate, with the action verb *kicked*. The rest of the words in the predicate tell us more about what happened: the ball is the object of the kicking and is therefore the direct object of kicked (that makes it a transitive verb, where action passes across from a subject to an object by means of it); then there are two prepositional phrases, beginning with to and in respectively—more information about the event.
- *The dog died at the scene of the accident.* Here the subject is the *dog* and the verb is this time intransitive, *died*, because it doesn't have an object.

(Some verbs can be both transitive and intransitive—in the first example, *Birds fly*, *fly* is intransitive, but in a sentence like *Pilots fly aeroplanes*, *fly* is transitive because action passes across from pilots to aeroplanes.)

These are simple, **declarative** sentences.[1]

The normal (or canonical) form of a sentence is **Subject → Predicate including finite verb**, as in these examples. However, sentences can be written as questions, and then the order is changed and they are known as **interrogative** sentences:

- *Do birds fly?* (the subject is still *birds*; the verb phrase is now *do fly*)
- *Is Robin a boy?*
- *Did John kick the ball?*

See how the verb has changed position? The verb, or part of it, is usually at the beginning of the sentence, ahead of the subject.

Another type of sentence is known as a **directive**. As this suggests, it expresses an order or instruction:

- *Come down to the coffee shop when you're ready.*
- *Finish this job before you start the new one.*

Do you see what's happened to the verb? It's at the beginning of the sentence. And the subject seems to have disappeared. Actually, in each case, 'you' (the person addressed) is understood as the subject.

Finally, there's the **exclamative** sentence, or exclamation, usually uttered in fear, anger or as a warning or other extreme emotional state:

- *Mummy, I had a bad dream. I'm scared!*
- *This is absolutely delicious ice cream!*
- *What a naughty puppy you are!*
- *Look out!*

You tell me: where's the subject in each of these sentences?

These terms are taking the place of the old moods: indicative and imperative. Most of the writing you will do in business, and most of what you are likely to have to edit, will be declarative (the old indicative mood). If you are editing novels, however, you are more likely to come across interrogative and imperative sentences, with perhaps some exclamative sentences. There is a mood that I have not mentioned yet—subjunctive. I will leave that for another time because it involves complex sentences, and in this article I have stuck to simple sentences only.

Before I go, **what is NOT a sentence?**

Referring to your email is not a sentence, though many people start their email replies with it

What is not a sentence?

A fragment is not a sentence:

- *In the morning* is a prepositional phrase that tells us more about something else, but where's the 'something else'—what happened to what 'in the morning'?
- *The blue car on the other side of the street* could be the subject of a sentence but it has no predicate so we don't know what the writer wants to say about it.
- *Running for the bus* has part of a verb (the present participle 'running') at the beginning, but not a finite verb and there's no subject so we don't know what the fragment is referring to.
- *Referring to your email* is not a sentence, though many people start their email replies with it and put a full stop after it—it only has the present participle of 'refer', and there is no subject.

Ah, but what about conversations between characters in novels—do they always have to be sentences? No, they don't. When we write out people's conversations, we write them as they would be spoken, and we often speak in fragments:

'Are you coming to the movies?' (complete sentence)

'Not today.' (fragment, standing for the complete sentence *'No, I am not coming today'*)

'When, then?' (fragment, standing for the complete sentence '*When can you come, then?*')

'Tomorrow any good?' (fragment, standing for the complete sentence '*Is tomorrow any good?*')

This conversation is perfectly understandable, though strictly not good grammar. Other situations in which you might find fragments being used perfectly acceptably are where as few words as possible are best for getting a message across quickly, such as on medicine labels, in evacuation instructions, in firearm usage instructions, on public notices where danger exists, and in advertising:

- *For external use only*
- *Toilets here*
- *Steep hill*
- *Available in blue and black*
- *Brand X—your passport to beauty*

Elizabeth Manning Murphy, 2010

Note 1: For more about a fresh approach to describing sentences, read Mark Tredennick's *The little green grammar book*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2008. I have incorporated his four purposes for writing sentences in this article.

> Fragments are acceptable where as few words as possible are best for getting a message across

Your new committee

You might notice a few new names on the list of committee members on the inside cover of this newsletter:

- **Claudia Marchesi** has taken on the role of vice-president from Damaris Wilson.
- **Tracy Harwood** is our new treasurer, having taken over from Margaret Millard.
- **Eris Harrison** is the new secretary, replacing Brian O'Donnell who was forced to step down because of a constitutional limitation on how long officer bearers can remain in one job.
- **Shirley Aitchison** is the membership secretary, and she will now be the first point of contact for those who want to apply to join the society.

There's still a need for some more hands on deck with the newsletter. It is something best done by a team: a senior editor, someone to lay out the text, a copyeditor, and a proofreader. Some of these roles have been filled already (thank you to Damaris Wilson and Kerie Newell), but more help is always good. Contact the committee if you can spare a couple of hours a month to help out.

There's still room for more if you want to be part of the committee. There's a role for general committee members, who generally have no specific tasks other than to be a part of committee discussions and decisions about your society.

Finally, thank you to those who have worked hard this past year.

Cathy Nicoll

A guide to style guides

This month, I am focusing on various style issues:

- finding answers to questions of style
- creating accessible style guides
- working with multiple clients with different style preferences.

Finding answers

A recent post on the *Copy editors and proofreaders* group in LinkedIn (linkedin.com) alerted me to a new site – OnlineStylebooks.com. This site has links to about 40 online style manuals, which can be viewed alphabetically or by subject. All the major guides are there – although some are only available online by subscription (e.g. *The Chicago Manual of Style*). One publication that looks especially useful, particularly for those who write for the web, is the new *Yahoo!* style guide. This book started life as an in-house reference guide for writers and programmers at *Yahoo!*. It covers the basics of grammar and punctuation, but also has sections on creating clear structure, writing for an online audience, designing websites and creating text that works with other media (e.g. mobile phones).

Most of the *Yahoo!* guide can be accessed online (at styleguide.yahoo.com). I particularly like the *Editing 101* section of the site, which covers punctuation, abbreviations, capitals, titles and numbers. The information is clear and concise, with many examples and helpful asides about web-related issues. For example, the section on dashes outlines the uses of ens and ems, but also explains that dashes need extra html coding to display correctly on the web. Even after this extra work, dashes may not appear correctly in some formats, such as text messages, so the guide recommends using a hyphen instead.

The OnlineStyle list also includes Wikipedia's *Manual of style*, which starts with the helpful advice to 'use common sense in applying it'! The manual is intended to give a consistent style to Wikipedia articles, but also includes useful general information on grammar and punctuation.

Creating and sharing style guides

Many organisations create an in-house style guide. When delivering training courses on writing and editing, however, I have found that few people realise that their organisation has a style guide, and even fewer make use of it. Often, the guide is a printed document, which is perhaps not the best format, because it probably just gets buried on a desk or bookshelf.

To increase the likelihood that the style guide will be used, organisations can make it a living document, such as a wiki. Wikis are simple webpages that users can edit together (Wikipedia is a well-known example). Usually, the point of a wiki is that people can work collaboratively on a document. In the case of a style guide, it is probably best to restrict the ability to change the content (to ensure that style remains set as intended!), but enable all users to add comments or queries. Thus, for example, a user could add a question about whether to hyphenate a particular term that is not in the guide, and other users would be able to respond. Whoever is responsible for the wiki could then update the style guide in response to the comments. Wiki style guides have many advantages; for example, they are easy to use, searchable and always up to date.

Working with multiple styles

My clients have a range of style preferences; for example, one specifies 'appendices' and another 'appendixes', one prefers 'program' and another 'programme', and so on. I use *PerfectIt* (www.intelligentediting.com) to cope with this situation, creating a customised database for each client. I also use style sheets to track any decisions not covered by a client's style guide, and I create these in a wiki (from intodit.com). Thus, instead of sending a Word style sheet to the client or to anyone working with me, I simply provide the wiki address. This means that I can feel confident that everyone will be looking at the latest version of the relevant style sheet.

My system is set up so that anyone using the wiki can log in and either comment on the style decisions or add terms where necessary. The wiki also alerts me (by email) when changes have been made, so I can keep track of what's happening. When saving a change to a page within the wiki, a dialogue box appears that asks for a brief description of the changes. Adding this information means that the page has a history, so that users can look at the notes about why particular changes were made.

Hilary Cadman

> I still depend on traditional tools such as style sheets and style guides. But I have been able to replace paper and books with web-based tools.
>
> I find it quicker and easier to use online style guides, customised spelling lists and wiki style sheets. It allows me to work from anywhere, provided I have an internet connection.

Thinking about words: electing the élite

I almost called this little piece 're-Membering the Members', but in that case the dissolution of Parliament before the election would have to be their 'dis-Membering', which sounds altogether too gruesome. As I write this, the election is just over and for one party at least this will no doubt mean recriminations, looking for a scapegoat, punishing the innocent. Much more sensible for us editors to look calmly at the language of elections and consider how the words have come to us.

The word 'election' and almost anything like it (elect, elector, élite) goes back to the Latin *eligere*, meaning 'to pick out, to choose'. But *eligere* itself (just like 'elect') is one of a whole family of words such as *colligere*, to collect, *seligere* to select. If we ask where the root *ligere* began, we find ourselves back at *legere*, which we saw last month means not only to read, but also has the meaning 'to gather'. The prefix *e-* or *ex-* has the sense of 'out of' (*ex-* also means 'former'), so *e-ligere* is to gather something by picking it out of some larger grouping, as we pick our new Members from the group of candidates. In 'collect' we are gathering things or people together, as we might be collecting our colleagues into a college, or selecting antique silver for our collection.

Not every *–lect* has the same significance. 'Dialect', for example, began as a Greek word for conversation, picked up by the Romans to refer to a local way of speaking. The Greek word *dialogue* also means a conversation, but note that the prefix is *dia-*, 'through', not *di-*, 'two'. Many people think that a dialogue is limited to two people, but in fact it can quite properly be between any number. If you're talking to yourself it's a 'monologue', even if you're on stage with 500 in the audience.
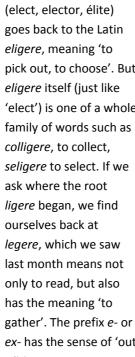
And by the way, that word *élite*, which has come to us directly from the French and still sports its little acute accent to prove it, really does need that accent. Leave it off, and you are talking about a bishop-elect or a standard type size in typewriters—12 letters to the inch, as compared with 'pica', at 10 to the inch. Having said which, I'm compelle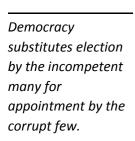d to admit that Macquarie 3rd edition omits the accent, and so does Webster in his main entry, although he rather condescendingly adds 'Br. é-lite'.

We've been electing candidates, who have not always been conspicuous for their candour. So why are they called 'candid'? It seems that in Roman times the candidates for office wore white togas to impress people with their pure intentions. Latin for white is *candidus*, and from the 17th century on this term was borrowed in English for hopefuls in any kind of election. The French have that same word, *candidat*, from a century earlier, but originally applied it to a toady in the royal court, somebody trying to obtain the monarch's favour. They could also use *aspirant* for somebody aspiring to a position—not necessarily in the public domain, it could be a lover wooing his lady fair. He would have to be really working at it, because the original sense of 'aspire' was to pant! There's true ardour for you ...

Until quite recently, and certainly in the Eatanswill election (the subject of our picture) attended by Mr Pickwick in the 1830s, the candidates for office were presented to the populace on the *hustings*, from which they also proclaimed their policies. The hustings would generally have been a raised platform set up in a busy public space, like a

Democracy substitutes election by the incompetent many for appointment by the corrupt few.

Shaw, Man and superman

market square. Nowadays the term is used more generally to describe the electoral situation and processes, and the hoo-hah surrounding them.

The Old English word *hus-thing* referred to the 'house assembly', a council held by a king or some great noble at his house, and attended by his immediate followers. The ordinary people did their own 'thing', their assembly, at a less grand level.

Your *poll* is your head, and more specifically the top part of it where the hair grows. It was originally a Dutch word, which entered English in the 13th century, for no very obvious reason. The Dutch only really became involved with England in the 17th century, at the time of the Anglo-Dutch wars and when the Dutch engineer Vermuyden was busy draining the fens in eastern England. Be that as it may, it soon became a term used when counting heads in a census. A 'poll tax' was a tax of an equal amount levied on the entire population, which you can imagine would be seen as rather unfair by the lower classes – the poll of 1380 triggered the Peasants' Revolt. The OED quotes '1689 Lond. Gaz. No. 2449/4 An Act for Raising Money by a Poll, and otherwise, towards the Reducing of Ireland', but all the later evidence is that Ireland was irreducible! 'The Poll' was already being used early in the 17th century for counting votes in an election, and essentially that sense and polling public opinion in a survey is where we now stand. Many of our politicians are on record saying, 'The only poll that matters is the poll on polling day', and we are still reeling under the implications of the most recent one.

One implication, as I write this, is the likelihood of a 'hung parliament', a parliament with no absolute majority of seats. We have to realise that this is the normal state of affairs in most countries (and in the ACT and Tasmania), which have several political parties, none of which has an absolute majority.

However, Australia, the UK and Canada all have just a couple of major parties and a 'first past the post' system. In these countries, one or other of the parties can usually secure enough votes to govern, perhaps by alliances with members of minor parties. Australia had its first hung parliament in 1940; Menzies was initially able to govern with the support of two independent MPs but, when they switched their allegiance, John Curtin replaced him.

Michael Quinion, in his World Wide Words, says, 'The term *hung parliament* came into the British political lexicon as a result of Harold Wilson's failure to win conclusively in the election of February 1974. He led a minority administration until another election was forced the next October. The *Times* wrote in early August, "The House is up, and the odds are that our 'hung' Parliament will not meet again." The related term *hung Senate* had been used in Australia during that country's elections in May 1974.'

So, for the moment we hold our collective breath. Perhaps by the time this sees print all will be made plain ...

Peter Judge

Sources: *Oxford English Dictionary* Second Edition on CD-ROM (v. 4.0), 2009. *Encyclopædia Britannica* 2009 Ultimate Reference Suite. Michael Quinion's World Wide Words at <www.worldwidewords.org/topicalwords/tw-hun2.htm>.

The image 'Election at Eatanswill' by Phiz (Halbot K. Browne), originally published in Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*, chapter 3, is taken from <www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/phiz/9.html> Victorian web allows this image 'to be used without prior permission for any scholarly or educational purpose.'

IPEd discussion

Following concerns raised by Gil Garcon about IPEd, Gil and Ted Briggs are convening a discussion group. The aim is to give people the opportunity to raise any issues and ideas they may have.

The Canberra Society of Editors is proud to have helped instigate IPEd. We continue to support it, but concerns about accountability back to the member societies need to be addressed.

Contact Ted at: <tedbriggs@grapevine.com.au> for further information.

Final reminder – membership renewals

If you haven't yet renewed your membership for 2009–10, you should do so now.

Anyone who hasn't renewed by the end of September will be removed from the register of members and the freelance register.

This could also be your last newsletter.

Membership cards have now been sent out to most renewing members.

If you haven't yet received a card and receipt and believe that you've paid your subscription, let the treasurer know as soon as possible. There are some unidentified payments in the society's bank account that are looking for owners. If you think one of them might be yours, email your details to the Treasuer – Tracy Harwood at <tracyharwood@grapevine.net.au>.

The renewal form is on the website at <www.editorscanberra.org>.

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The Canberra editor

Newsletter schedule

The next newsletter will appear in October 2010 and for that issue the copy deadline is 1 October.

The editor welcomes contributions by email to: <kerie1@optusnet.com.au>.

SURFACE MAIL

POSTAGE PAID AUSTRALIA