

Edition

The journal of the Editors' Association of Canada, Toronto branch

DECEMBER 2008

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of Arthur Plotnik's
book, *Spunk & Bite:
A Writer's Guide to
Bold, Contemporary
Style* 21



Edition

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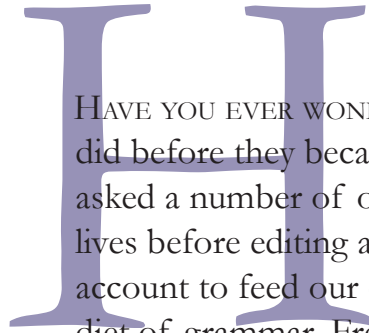
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Editor's Note



HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED WHAT YOUR FELLOW EDITORS did before they became wordsmiths? Caroline Kaiser asked a number of our branch members about their lives before editing and came up with a riveting account to feed our curiosity. And for our monthly diet of grammar, Freya Godard reflects on an issue many editors struggle with: how much should an editor tell an author about their grammatical mistakes? Freya provides useful insights into the matter. Linda Dessau, in her presentation on business relationships at October's branch meeting, provided additional advice on coping with the sometimes tricky relationships we have with authors. Elizabeth Trew's report on Linda's presentation includes a list of pointers to enhance your professional performance and well-being. My favourite of these pointers is: Smile before you answer the phone. I have been doing so ever since that meeting, and I think it makes me sound more professional, if not more pleasant. I highly recommend trying it. (An expanded version of the program handout will soon be available on the EAC Web site.)

I wish you all happy holidays. *Edition* will be back in February after a short break.

Sara Promislow

Newsletter chair

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The October meeting with guest speaker, Linda Dessau.



Business relationship management essentials for editors

What one freelance writer learned in her first three years

By Elizabeth Trew

HELP ME! I JUST CAN'T DEAL with my demanding clients. Sound familiar?

Sometimes we forget that we're not just in the business of editing or writing; we're in the business of fulfilling the needs of our clients. We can get so lost in our work, we forget our purpose.

October's guest speaker, Linda Dessau—writer, editor, life coach, and music therapist—had us nodding our heads in agreement with words of wisdom about the mistakes she's made and what she's learned from her three years as an editor.

Linda admitted that she would do things differently if she had to start all over again. At her first EAC meeting in June, a light went off in her head while bantering with her fellow editors about the all too common frustrations of dealing with difficult clients.



Linda Dessau, guest speaker

She thought, why not share what she's learned?

Linda started out as a life coach but she loved writing and considered herself an editor. Her own coach suggested combining the two to complement her business. Over time, Linda developed a niche market by helping other life coaches with writing, discovering by trial and error how to avoid conflicts with clients and build lasting business relationships.



Underestimating and overestimating— Walking a tightrope

Like many new editors, Linda didn't know how long projects would take when providing an estimate to clients. "There's nothing worse than an angry client who is surprised when you exceed your agreed-upon budget. Keep in touch with your clients to let them know when you are approaching your budget", she advised. Another editor advised that when under budget call your clients to ask if there's anything else you could do for them that would fit within their budget.

With multiple deadlines to meet, there's always too much work and only so many hours in a day. When Linda replaced the term "deadline" with "scheduled delivery date", she felt more positive about her work. "Deadline' sounds so negative, while 'delivery' is a positive word", she explained.

From knowing it all to knowing where to look

Now when she looks back on her old articles, Linda detects many errors. But her work had improved quickly, as she taught herself what she needed to know and took courses to hone her writing and editing skills. To help coaches who couldn't write and to make her job of editing easier, she combined a variety of style guides to self-publish a book, *The Customizable Style Guide for Coaches Who Write*.



From hoping to asking and from promoting to attracting

I'm sure all of us have completed a job and had no idea whether we'd met our client's needs. *How do we know if we don't ask?* Linda advises that when finishing a project, we should find out what our clients think about our work and ask them for testimonials and referrals. Linda says that such promoting is like buying advertising. Anyone can do it; all it takes is money. Rather, she aims to attract clients, saying, "When a client likes you so much they can't stop talking about you, *that's attraction.*"

From avoiding to embracing

In the past, Linda either ran from conflict or fought for her position, finding neither to be very helpful. To help with confrontation, it's vital to pay attention to the client's viewpoint, rather than simply reacting or responding emotionally. Linda provided a few common-sense suggestions to help us work with our clients:



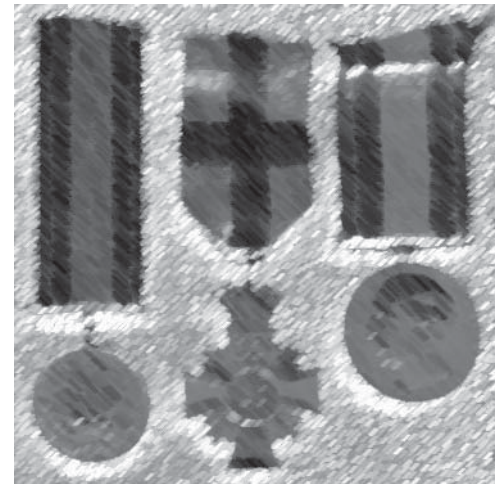
- Stop thinking that clients get in the way of work. They're the reason why we are in business!
- When responding to a client, say thank you at the beginning of every e-mail, rather than rush off a curt response.
- Always say thank you when a client asks about your services.
- When upset, don't jump in and start reacting. Pause. Before sending an e-mail or speaking, ask yourself, "How should I handle this?"
- Smile when answering the phone. (Put a mirror by the phone to check yourself.)

From being right to being of service

When working with an unreasonable client, it's important to work "in the spirit of service", rather than focusing on what or who is right or wrong. Linda says that, above all, the client is the expert on content. Let the client have the final say.

Linda related a lesson she learned early on. A client was very upset when the formatting on a document she had edited differed from the original. Initially she thought about charging the client to change the formatting, as it was not her fault. She quickly realized that to avoid alienating her client and potentially losing him, she would absorb the cost "in the spirit of service".

As a final tip, Linda added that when feeling discouraged by a demanding client, it helps to keep a file with positive client feedback to look at for a quick morale boost.



When working with an unreasonable client, it's important to work "in the spirit of service", rather than focusing on what or who is right or wrong.



An abundance of resources

Linda's Web site, www.youtalk-inwrite.com, has a plethora of resources she's developed with links to other sites for her clients. It includes an *Idea Generator* blog designed to spark one's creativity (too bad I didn't know about this earlier!) and a *Top 10 Article Generator*, which is provided free with her weekly e-mail updates.

Linda's words of wisdom provided us with a blueprint for establishing successful business relationships. Her calm demeanor and self-assuredness illustrated that she walks the walk when dealing with difficult clients. ■■■

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■ For your diary pages

Executive Meeting

Monday, December 15, 2008
6:30 PM
EAC National office,
27 Carlton Street, Suite 505
All members are welcome
RSVP: toronto_br_membership_chair@editors.ca

General Meeting

Monday, January 26, 2009
6:45 PM New members Q & A
7:30 PM Program: To be announced
9 PM Mix-and-mingle

The Women's Art Association of Canada
23 Prince Arthur Avenue
Members free/non-members \$10

■ Welcome new members!

As of November 1, 2008, the Toronto branch has 700 members: 447 voting (including 2 honorary life members), 188 qualifying, 46 student members, and 9 emeritus members. 7 members identified themselves as Francophone. A total of 32 people have joined since October. The new members are:

Corinne Aeschelmann
Susan Brown
Toni Burghout
Frances Campbell
Jennifer Crump
Alison Cunliffe
Jane DuBroy
Will Evanson
Catherine Haggerty
Chris Henderson
Janet Jardine
Erin Joyce
Julie Karner
Julie Kretchman
Joyce Lai
Sarah Loat

Anne MacLean
Joan MacNeil
Margot Mallinson
Vytas Mockus
Ramona Monsour
Sophia Moore
Aline Noguès
George Pearson
Diana Pereira
Nita Pronovost
Tessa Ryan-Lipp
Theresa Smyth
Sarah Symonds
Shirley Tessier
Eva VanderBerg
Teresa Wagner

| Hotline Report | October 2008 |
|--|---|
| Members registered | 11 |
| Clients registered: Hotline opportunities | 3 Project 1: Elementary school Social Studies textbook Project 2: Manuscript for publication (personal memoir of a holocaust survivor) Project 3: Autobiographical article (health issues related to environmental toxins) |

Hotline Registration

Clients call to be matched with branch members who have registered with the Hotline for work.

When you register, please note these guidelines:

If you are listed in the EAC Directory of Editors (print or online), note any changes to your listing.

If you are not listed in the Directory and have not previously registered with the Hotline, send your resumé in Directory or Hotline style. You can find guidelines to the Directory format at www.editors.ca/hire/ode/search_tips.html.

Hotline style follows the Directory format. However, you may include as many interests as you wish and write your profile in point form.

Please limit your resumé to one page.

If you have registered before, send your resumé only if it has changed.

Hotline registration begins on the first of each month. Please contact the branch every month to be listed again.

Telephone: 416 975-5528 Fax: 416 975-5596
toronto@editors.ca (.rtf attachment; subject: Hotline)

A word from the branch chair

By Alan Yoshioka

IN OCTOBER THE BRANCH HAD ITS FIRST BUSINESS meeting under the new format. Because of the current economic uncertainty, members decided to postpone the discussion of recommended rates until the business meeting in February. In the meantime, a committee chaired by Annie Leung will research the issue of rates and set up a structure for that discussion. Annie is looking for other members to join her and Jennie Worden on the committee. Both of them now work in-house, so freelancers, especially those who work in sectors other than book publishing, would be particularly welcome. Please contact Annie, the branch Vice-chair, if you would like to participate or if you have ideas about what kind of rate guidelines would be useful (toronto_br_vice-chair@editors.ca).

In other news, the Toronto executive has met to discuss the branch budget for 2009, which we will finalize at our December meeting.

The 2009 EAC conference has booked 89 Chestnut Street as its venue. Look for details in the next Active Voice and set aside June 5 to 7, 2009, for a memorable 30th anniversary gathering. ■■■

30th
Anniversary
JUNE 5–7, 2009

Alan Yoshioka, Branch chair
toronto_br_chair@editors.ca

NEC representative report

By Ken Weinberg

EAC'S NATIONAL EXECUTIVE Council (NEC) met in Toronto on the November 29-30 weekend to discuss policies, projects, and finances. Reports from all the committees, mostly relayed via members-at-large, show that the association continues to strengthen and improve. The state of the association's finances are much clearer now, thanks to the vastly improved reports produced by the national office. With these reports in hand, we were able to pass a balanced budget, even with very conservative revenue estimates for membership, online tools, and the conference. What struck me most dramatically—it being my first NEC budget meeting—was how much we accomplish with our limited expense levels, thanks to the fantastic volunteer support (though more help is always appreciated).

After the budget was passed, we were able to shift to more strategic matters like how to handle increased growth of the association by better supporting the members who live

outside the major centres. Once the council has examined the situation thoroughly, NEC will begin consulting with the general membership. The end result will make us even more effective at realizing our strategic goals, which are:

- to foster professionalism in editing
- to increase awareness of the value of editing
- to provide professional services to our members throughout their careers
- to strengthen the association and enhance EAC as a community

Finally, I'd like to remind all branch members that I'm your elected representative on the NEC and if you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please contact me without hesitation.

All the best to my fellow members in the holiday season and the new year. ■■■

Ken Weinberg
NEC representative
torontorep@editors.ca

Plans for the winter/spring 2009 seminars

DECEMBER IS HERE, AND WITH IT, another seminar season draws to a close. Thanks to all those who participated and to the instructors and volunteers who offered their time, skills, and expertise.

Planning for the winter/spring 2009 season is now under way. Look for standard seminars, such as *Proofreading* and *Copy Editing: A Hands-on Introduction*, returning favourites such as *Indexing* and *Developing a House Style*, and a brand-new offering: *Developmental Editing for the K–12 Market*.

Complete details and a full schedule are forthcoming in January. Keep an eye on your mailbox for our new promotional postcard, or visit us online at www.editors.ca/branches/toronto/seminars. ■■■

Emily Dockrill, Seminar chair
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Before we were editors

By Caroline Kaiser



WHEN I FIRST JOINED THE EAC in 2007, I assumed that most members had always been editors and that I was one of the few making a radical career change to professional word doctor. I couldn't have been more wrong.

I'd been an antiques appraiser for an auction house for 14 years and, with the help of George Brown College editing courses, was moving into editing. It was reassuring to encounter many editors at EAC meetings who had a previous career or two under their belt. A successful transition into editing was possible! And it was fascinating to hear what members did in their pre-editing days. Recently, I threw out the topic of previous careers to the listserv, and my inbox was inundated with lively responses.

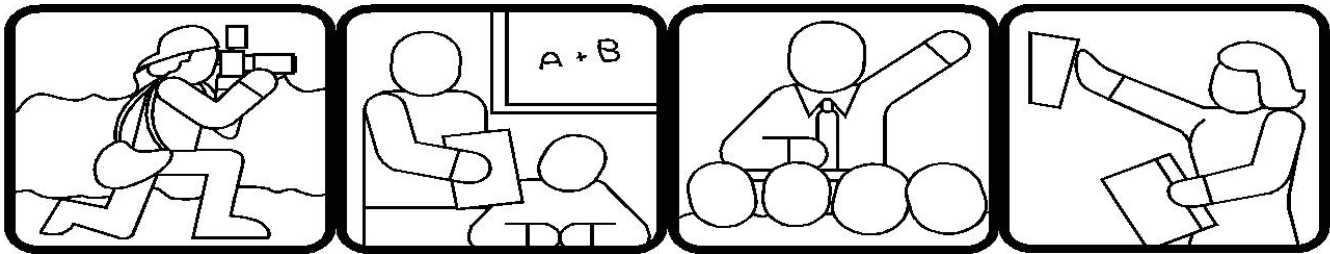
Twenty-two editors (many of whom are freelancers) wrote about life before editing, and the diversity of professions was intriguing. The group comprised a generous helping of educators, a

sprinkling of scientists, two musicians, one lawyer, a market research consultant, an investment analyst, an administrative assistant, a human resources specialist, a computer programmer, a bookseller, and two hospitality industry employees. Another person had bounced from editing to the corporate world and back to editing again.

I was curious: At what age had we become editors? My 44th birthday had just passed when I quit the auction house, but was being forty-something typical of career changers? Apparently so, since the average age at which we embarked on an editing career was just shy of 40. (The youngest respondent was just 22 when he made the change, while the oldest was 57.)

What factors prompted EAC members to switch to editing? My reasons were many. I'd started editing catalogues in my final year at the auction house, which was ultimately more rewarding than appraising and cataloguing silver, glass, and porcelain. My job also involved





schlepping these objects around, which had grown exhausting. But even more exhausting was a power-hungry, hostile subordinate who made my decision to leave much easier. Several editors also cited exhaustion as a factor. Sue Innes, who taught high-school German and French, wrote that teaching was “an exhausting job, particularly if you’re a perfectionist.” (And what editor isn’t?) Linda Jenkins, who had been a human resources administrator/manager, described herself as “absolutely drained from 15 years of conflict and problem-solving”, and she suffered a burn-out episode as a result of her experiences.

Others were motivated to pursue editing by careers that had dried up or seemed destined to disappear. Rosemary Tanner, a former University of Toronto Zoology Department research technician who specialized in blood-sucking insects, wrote that “grants were not increasing, and I didn’t see that the job would be there much longer.” Similarly, Janice Dyer, who was an educational researcher for the Etobicoke

Board of Education, noted that “the board amalgamated and downsized the research department.” And when the bookstore where John



Eerkes-Medrano worked announced it would be closing, he took a customer up on an offer to train as an editor.

Many simply realized that editing was a natural fit, and they either dipped their toes in tentatively or jumped right in. Madeline Koch had worked in the hotel industry and studied film. She edged into editing by inputting newsletter articles for her brother and writes that, “I couldn’t resist correcting things as I typed.” Karen Black, who’d worked in retail and the hospitality industry, also made a gradual change, starting with copy editing jobs for customers at the bar where she worked and culminating in being hired as a full-time technical writer/editor. In contrast, Grace Cherian, a former administrative assistant whose high-school classmates dubbed her “the walking dictionary”, plunged zealously into editing after being continually “appalled by the typos, punctuation, or grammatical errors” she encountered.

Do EAC editors miss aspects of their previous careers? I confess that being surrounded by an ever-changing parade of antiques was stimulating, and I do miss a colleague who shared my love of golden age Hollywood movies. Several editors



also mentioned that they missed the camaraderie of workplace friends. Others lamented the loss of a regular paycheque, although two noted that they made more as editors. Former orchestral and concert musician-turned-photographer Michael Peebles missed public life, which he defined as “living a life in which your work, *as you are working on it*, is somehow shown or made known to many, many people, mostly strangers.” And the well-travelled Marie-Lynn Hammond noted that, although she got sick of driving and flying around to make a living, she missed scenic places she'd visited as a folk musician, such as the Canadian Arctic, Mexico, and Russia.

When asked what they *didn't* miss, EAC members reeled off lengthy lists. “How long have you got to read?” quipped ex-lawyer Janet MacMillan before providing

“I most definitely do not miss the office politics, or ‘human relations’... I saw enough political manoeuvring to last me a lifetime!”

an impressive list that included a “total lack of collegiality”, “unhealthily long hours”, and the fact that “[the legal profession] takes over one’s life.” I can’t say I miss the 24/7 aspects of the auction business, such as absurd deadlines and late-night auctions. Nor do I miss clients who suffered from *Antiques Roadshow* syndrome (the persistent delusion that all family heirlooms are worth astronomical sums). And I wish I could forget the watery bowls of oatmeal that

the hostile subordinate left on her desk for days on end. Indeed, colleagues beat out offensive body odours on streetcars, lengthy commutes, and fixed daily schedules to take the top spots on the not-missed list. “I most definitely do not miss the office politics, or ‘human relations’... I saw enough political manoeuvring to last me a lifetime!” Linda Jenkins declared.

Many editors found that their former professions were closely tied to their editing



...most EAC editors don't regret the change, even on days when editing is less than enthralling.

work. For example, I write and ghostwrite articles for antiques magazines and edit an antiques column. Similarly, Gaele Chevalier, who was a cellular and molecular biologist, edits and translates only medical and scientific materials. Some editors, like Janet MacMillan, began editing materials related to their field (law) but gradually branched out into other fields (social sciences). Others still find no connection between their previous occupation and their editing work: despite his musical and visual arts background, Michael Peebles edits only medical materials.

A few editors emphasized that their previous careers were excellent preparation for editing. Lenore Hietkamp, who spent 11 years as a graduate student, wrote that “graduate school has been my training for my freelance work.” And Beth Macfie, who worked as a continuing education manager for a CEGEP¹, noted that, she “learned a

little bit about a lot of things while running programs and courses...same as I do as an editor.” Some of her training program topics even came up in her editing work, such as proofreading a book about the James Bay Cree communities, three of which she’d visited as a manager.

Some respondents perceived their career change as more of a shift, an expansion into a different aspect of their field. Others saw it as a colossal leap into the unknown. Whatever the case, most EAC editors don’t regret the change, even on days when editing is less than enthralling. At such times, editors can always look to the past for reassurance that they’re now better off. As former bank teller Antonia Morton reminds herself, “The worst day of editing still beats the best day of banking.” ■■■

Caroline Kaiser
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¹ The College of General and Vocational Education (CEGEP) is part of Quebec’s education system.



Grammar food for thought

An editor's observations on grammar and usage

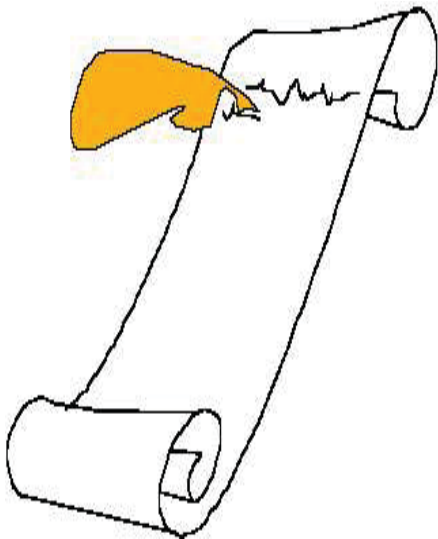
Editor, author, and grammar

By Freya Godard

For an editor it is often less difficult to correct the grammar and usage of a manuscript than to decide how, or even whether, to explain the corrections to the author. Some editors write copious notes of explanation; others write almost none, on the assumption that the reason for a correction will be self-evident. The ideal is to correct the mistakes while making the author understand and accept the editor's reasoning without being embarrassed by having his or her mistakes exposed, intelligence insulted, or time wasted.

The reason for some corrections is obvious or not likely to be of interest to the author—that is likely to be the case when the correction involves agreement of subject and verb, tense or mood, choices of preposition, or punctuation. Also usually self-evident or unexceptionable is the rearranging of a sentence to correct a misplaced modifier or dangling participle. Nevertheless, I have sometimes inserted a comment such as “Reason for change is to get rid of dangling participle”.

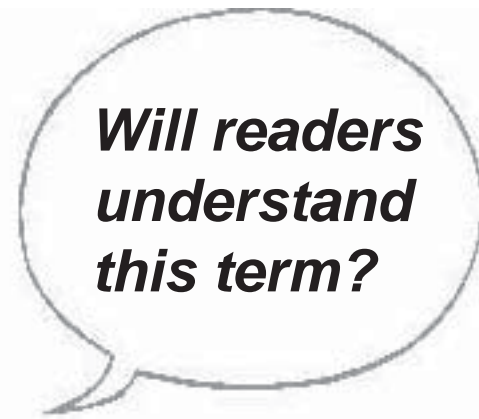
Sometimes, though, an editor rearranges a sentence, not because anything is wrong with the syntax, but simply because the sentence is too long. Such was the case with a 111-word sentence I encountered. Needless to say, I set about dividing it up—not an easy task as it turned out, for a fair bit of rewriting was needed. On the assumption that an author who would write a sentence of that length might not find it obvious why I had cut it up, I inserted what I hoped was a humorous note to the effect that 111 words made for a rather long sentence. (I was already on



good terms with the author; her reply was “woops!”)

For the most part, I find that corrections in syntax need less explanation than corrections of vocabulary, usage, or idioms. Especially when the editor is not very familiar with the subject of a manuscript, it is important not to replace an unfamiliar or apparently awkward expression without querying the author. If such a term is used repeatedly, it is quite likely an accepted expression in the field. “Pan-Canadian”, for example, was used a number of times in a book I was editing to describe a movement or organization, and although it made sense, I found it unusual enough that I suggested that “Canada-wide” might be a more familiar expression. Her reply was that “pan-Canadian” was common in the literature of this specialty. Another way of handling a peculiar expression without admitting or suggesting that the editor finds it incomprehensible is to ask, “Will readers understand this term?” In that case, the author will either say “yes, they will” or substitute another word or phrase.

No matter how far-fetched an expression, it may, in fact, turn out to be common in the author’s field of specialty. For example, when I came to a sentence that mentioned the funding of “national machineries for the advancement of women” in the same manuscript mentioned above, I concluded that the author of that chapter was a non-native speaker and replaced “machineries”



with “mechanisms”. My queries to her read: “I don’t know if ‘mechanisms’ is the right word, but ‘machineries’ can’t be used in the plural” and, when the same word appeared again, “Odd expression. Will readers understand?” Only after submitting the edited chapter did I think to look on the Web, where, to my chagrin, I found more than 1,100 references to “women’s machineries”, which, it seems, are things like “national councils for women and ministerial gender units”. The sources, perhaps not surprisingly, were various NGOs and United Nations organizations.

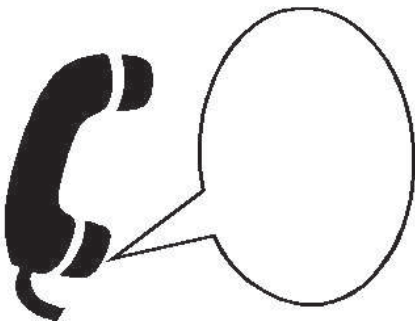
In the same manuscript I had to try to explain to the volume editor why she shouldn’t talk about the effect of certain government policies “on diverse Canadian women”. My long explanation ran as follows: “‘Diverse women’ means that the women (i.e., each woman) are diverse in themselves, whereas what you mean is that the female segment of the population is a diverse group. Perhaps you could say something like ‘a wide range of Canadian women’ or



‘Canadian women from a wide range of backgrounds.’”

Although it takes time to be constantly querying and explaining, it can take less time to explain at the beginning than to embark on a second round of explanations, queries, and editing. And sometimes a little more thought at the beginning may yield a correction that will be more acceptable since it entails fewer changes to the author’s words. Such was the case, again in the feminist manuscript, where the author of another chapter wrote, “The Family Supplement...provides extra money for children, consistent with social-investment discourse.” Rather than take the time to explain that the adjectival phrase “consistent with social-investment discourse” is a dangling modifier and that what is needed is an adverbial phrase, I simply replaced “consistent” with “in keeping”. But with no reason to know why I had made the change, the author replied that she preferred “consistent”. At that point, I realized that if I had simply inserted “as is” before “consistent”, I could have corrected the grammar without replacing the author’s original word, and, I suspect, she would not have objected.

Regardless of how many explanations the editor writes to the author, they will be more readily accepted if the editor has first established cordial relations by phoning or e-mailing to introduce herself and explain how she will be proceeding and what is expected of the author. And early in the editing, it’s always wise to send a thoroughly edited chapter, usually the first, so that the author will know what to expect, together with a covering note that refers to the editing as “suggested revisions” (while making it clear, however, that the publisher’s house style is not likely to be negotiable). Sometimes I also say, “Please let me know if I’m on the wrong track”, on the assumption, of course, that I am not. ■■■



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Spiting the hand that feeds you

A review of Arthur Plotnik's book

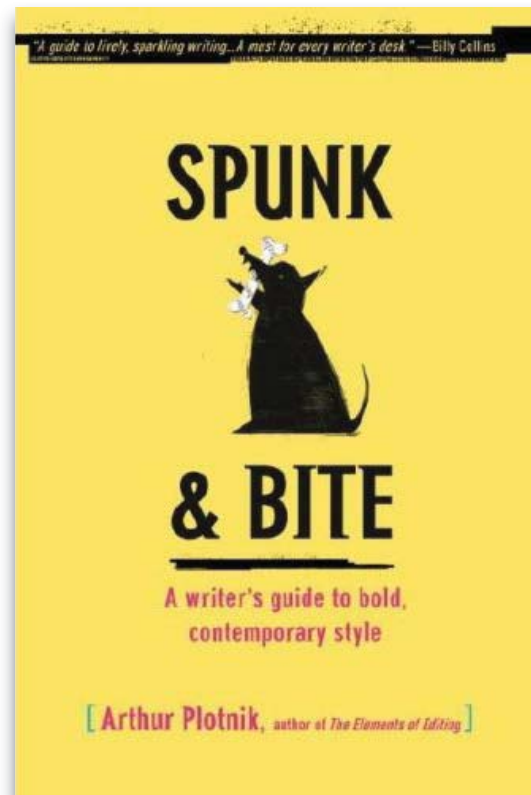
SPUNK & BITE:

A writer's guide to bold, contemporary style

(New York: Random House, 2007)

By Mary Allen

ARTHUR PLOTNIK'S *SPUNK & BITE* is like a Strunk and White for the Sesame Street generation. Surprise, variety, freshness, and pace are the writing attributes that the author values most highly and believes will help an author muscle out other contenders for a quick round of fame, fortune, and attention from reading audiences. This approach is far from the reserve of the venerable masters of grammar and taste in language, but Plotnik does not stop with debunking Strunk and White—Fowlers, Elmore Leonard, and other language stylists are also subject to a dose of contemporary scrutiny, as Plotnik eschews rules like daisy petals,



all in the service of creating the force, impact and “rude vitality” demanded by New Journalism (p. 7).

Despite his disclaimers, a good deal of Plotnik's book is modelled on the legendary *Elements of Style* and in a nod to the authorities in his introduction, Plotnik quietly acknowledges his debt to the arbiters of “correctness” in writing. As if in need of justification, Plotnik ferrets out a secret that is



often overlooked by readers of *Elements of Style* but that provides redemption. “Both Strunk and White knew well that bending the rules—judiciously breaking them—can give writing its distinction, its edge, its very style,” and help writers “get published” (p. 5). Commercial success often serves as Plotnik’s measure of good. It is this “whitewash” that Plotnik uses as a springboard for his own practical guide to live communications, and the balance of the book consists of an exhortation to push the limits of various language devices to achieve flexibility, freshness, texture, (best) word, force, form, clarity, and, most importantly, contemporaneity.

These eight writing goals form broad categories that Plotnik divides into chapters that address specific rules of usage, and how to effectively rebel against these language conventions. The part on texture, for example, contains chapters on tense, in which the past is “tried and true” and the present is “hot” just now but risky; diction, in which the only rule is that word choice must suit an author’s purpose and may or may not conform to audience expectations; and the use of trope, in which a punchy (good) one is “factory-fresh, unpredictable, economical, and custom fitted” with a “shelf life of about one use” (p. 63). In his prose,



Plotnik adopts his own counsel, using language as an opportunity to illustrate his points (for example, a “factory-fresh” trope) and the result is an entertaining romp through a sea of locution where the reader is trained to fish for the best technique. Plotnik does not rely solely on his own prose, however, but as Strunk and White did so effectively, draws on contemporary literature for examples. In some cases, quotations are drawn from the works of popular luminaries to illustrate questionable usage. Staying with the trope, consider the following:

“As he advanced...all his [fat] bulbs rose and shook and fell separately with each step, in the manner of clustered soap-bubbles not yet released from the pipe through which activity had been blown.”

Plucked from Dashiell Hammett’s *The Maltese Falcon*, Plotnik awards this trope a rating of 2 out of 10—he just can’t resist surprising readers

Plotnik is also concerned with delivering down-to-earth grammar instruction. Towards the end of the book, for example, he treats practical issues of form such as use of parataxis, the Feng Shui of writing (or how to maintain a composition’s *Chi*), proper use of modifiers, and how to construct a structured and rhythmical sentence. Ever the entertainer, Plotnik attends to these weightier matters



by peppering the text with fun exercises designed to create a more interactive experience: readers are invited at different points to rate the trope, create their own neologisms, and edit the works of well-known authors. Learning through these activities is reinforced by exercises for practice and study, which appear at the end of the book.

For all his rebelliousness, however, the author advises caution in many things. While tropes must be controlled, a thesaurus should be “looted” with respect to nuance in word meaning—here an old-fashioned dictionary is helpful, and the urge to let onomatopoeia “rip” must be resisted. While there is an upper limit on how many foreign words may be successfully integrated into a text, lazy enallage¹ can spawn jargon, leads can be overworked and endings clichéd, fragments overburdened, ephemeragy² quickly dated, and “edgy” misinterpreted as foul mouthed. For Plotnik, writing for a new generation is fraught with peril and, while pushing the



limits, writers must take care not to risk losing the “fundamentals of storytelling or poetry” (p. 233). These apparently do have some eternal qualities.

Plotnik’s years of experience as an editor have helped him develop and convey a good deal of skill with language, but also an air of world weariness about the business of publishing. He explains that as the number of themes that cross the desk of an editor are limited, writers must distinguish themselves through “masterly, distinctive use of language”. And though effective communication should tip a hat at correctness, the balance in Plotnik’s view appears tilted towards adventure. For Plotnik, great writers “must yield to their own sacred frenzy” (as did Johannes Kepler, the astronomer, when exalting on the discovery of the third law of planetary motion). The only thing that should harness language is the fear that a writer might “bore the reader!” ■■■

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- 1 According to Plotnik, *enallage* is a term grammarians use to refer to “the turning of nouns, verbs, and adjectives on their functional heads to produce novel usages” (p. 113).
- 2 Plotnik defines *ephemeragy* as “ephemeral imagery”, and uses the term to describe the use of various figures of speech that evoke pop culture references.