

West Coast EDITOR

A MONTHLY FORUM FOR EAC
MEMBERS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA
TO EXCHANGE IDEAS,
DEVELOP SKILLS, AND
SHARE NEWS ABOUT EDITING

JANUARY 2003

In this issue
SHAPESHIFTERS | 2
THE WRITER AS EDITOR | 3
GLOBALIZATION | 3
WHAT'S ON | 4



BC BRANCH

Substantive Editing: a Lesson in Diplomacy

Yvonne Van Ruskenveld, a member of West Coast Editorial Associates, has been a professional editor and writer since 1987. Her experience covers everything from editing technical reports and textbooks to writing brochures, manuals, reports, and articles. She also teaches business writing and editing through Words at Work Business Communications.

On Saturday, November 16, Van Ruskenveld took us through the basic process of substantive editing—a task that could be viewed by some of us as that magical process that makes something out of, if not nothing, perhaps not always very much...

Van Ruskenveld began by explaining what substantive editing is, using the EAC/ACR definition as her base: *Clarifying and/or reorganizing a manuscript for content and structure. Changes may be suggested to or drafted for the author. May include negotiating changes with the author.* She made a point of explaining that a substantive edit includes structural and stylistic editing and may even cover copy editing.

Conversely, Van Ruskenveld stressed that, with a substantive edit, the most effective approach begins by looking at the bigger picture. Ignore the picky, stylistic problems in the beginning, no matter how painful this may feel at the time! Read with the intention of anticipating the target reader's needs—will the reader interpret the text as it is intended? Skim the manuscript, a more effective use of your time at this stage than a close read. Mark your changes on the paper (or on-screen if you prefer—although it is often easier to work with paper as you can spread pages around and physically reorganize the manuscript) and then go back to edit the changes. Try to avoid introducing new stylistic problems.

Before submitting an estimate for a job, edit a selection of pages from different parts of the manuscript—you may find yourself struggling with 1½ pages per hour at times. The early pages tend to be the most straightforward; the problems arise as the author tires towards the middle or end of the text, or displays panic at an impending deadline. Never forget that your author has feelings. Don't scribble frantically all over a manuscript with red ink and expect to establish a good relationship (just for your interest, I always use green or purple if an author is going to see my mark-up). If you're using Track Changes in Word, use blue, for example, to highlight the changes; red is neither soothing nor complimentary. One very useful suggestion was to work in pencil—that way you can change your mind without leaving a disaster on the page.

Similarly, in your cover letter to the author, always, always, begin by saying something positive about the text. Be diplomatic in your criticisms. View them as comments or suggestions; it's more encouraging. One very serious point to keep in mind is the issue of plagiarism. Van Ruskenveld told us a very entertaining tale of an author who had managed to plagiarize himself from a book he had published with another company. Amusing as this was, it does have serious implications in the long run.

Before you get down to the serious work of actually fine editing the document, there are various points to keep in mind. Who is the target reader for the text? How much background or accumulated knowledge will the reader have? This will influence the level of the language used, how much terminology is acceptable and appropriate, and how much background detail will need to be explained. You may find that your lack of knowledge in a

Substantive Editing

(continued)

certain subject area makes you a better editor if you find yourself acting for the prospective lay reader. What is the purpose of the document? Is it designed to be read from cover to cover?

When assessing the manuscript at this stage, do not assume your author is an expert in anything. Van Ruskenveld explained that the author might not be familiar with the target reader's knowledge level and needs. For example, chronological ordering in a text often seems the most logical method, but it may turn out that ordering by issue is more appropriate. Make quick notes in the margin to achieve maximum editing in the minimum of time. Jot down the salient points if necessary and compare them against the table of contents. Note anything and everything that does not correspond. If your deadline is particularly tight, then focus only on those areas of the text that require serious surgery, "an editor's strategic skill." Do what you can in the time allowed.

If the manuscript is too long, your initial reaction may be to delete any repetitive areas. This could be a mistake if, for example, the text is an instruction manual where repetition is essential. A manual is designed for dipping into and not for reading from cover to cover. Think outside the text. Could a graph or photograph adequately sum up a paragraph or two in a fraction of the space? Or would this ultimately take up more space? (Don't forget about captions.) What about appendices—are they appropriate?

If the text is too short, then your task is to identify the gaps. What could be expanded? What issues have not been thoroughly explained?

When it comes time to actually give the author your suggestions for

reorganizing the material—whether cutting or adding text or reordering chapters or paragraphs—take extra care to provide concise instructions explaining your thoughts and suggestions. Keep the pages as clear as possible; do not distract your author with a mass of scribbles indicating typos. If the text needs a great deal of work, it may help to ask the author to produce a short summary. Writing a précis can work wonders on one's ability to focus clearly.

After this, you can concentrate on line editing—"smoothing it out" in Van Ruskenveld's words. Rewrite awkward passages if necessary; pay special attention to texts that have been translated—not everyone will use a qualified translator and it usually shows in the translated text. Be aware of the option of alternative text elements—perhaps a sidebar would be useful to explain a technique or expression without breaking up the paragraph in which it is first mentioned. Don't underestimate the value of a bulleted list or a snappy heading.

Above all, to quote Van Ruskenveld, "trust your judgment, be bold, be creative."

*Lesley Cameron,
Newsletter Co-Chair*

Shapeshifters: Society for Technical Communication Conference

The theme for the 2002 Society for Technical Communication (STC) Region 7 conference was "Shapeshifters: New Roles, New Tools, New Challenges." Held from November 7 to 9 at the Sheraton Wall Centre, the conference showcased the changing face of technical communication with sessions, exhibits, and product

demonstrations focusing on new skills and technologies.

Keynote speaker Jared Spool, acclaimed software developer and usability guru, discussed new directions and emerging issues in his areas of expertise. He warned that consumers are often so impressed by the mere existence of new technology that they fail to consider its usability.

Sessions on Friday and Saturday featured presenters from companies and universities around the globe, including Microsoft, IBM, the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology, and the Lower Mainland's own Douglas College. Workshops delivered information on new technologies and terminology for technical communicators.

Hot topics at the conference were XML, single-sourcing, online help authoring, content management, and information design. Seminars also covered traditional technical writing skills, such as proposal writing and journal authoring, and professional skills, including leadership, project management, and usability testing.

Local presenters figured prominently in the conference. UVic's Anke Weber delivered a session on SVG, an XML language for encoding text and graphics; Thomas Quine of Document Information Design Inc. addressed the topic of front-end analysis for information design; and Diana Wegner of Douglas College's Print Futures: Professional Writing Program gave an introduction to genre analysis, a useful tool for writers faced with unfamiliar tasks.

*Curtis Foreman,
Public Relations/
Industry Liaison Chair*



The Writer as Editor

I love being a writer, but I also like to eat on a regular basis. That's partly why I supplement my meagre writing income by working as an editor three days a week at Anvil Press in Vancouver. Anvil publishes Canadian fiction, poetry, and drama with a decidedly alternative bent. We also publish the literary magazine *subTerrain*.

I was fortunate enough to land a summer internship at Anvil last year through the Print Futures: Professional Writing Program at Douglas College. I did all those "intern" things—proofreading, answering phones, making photocopies, and, for the first few days anyway, trying hard not to get underfoot in the tiny office. It was an opportunity to prove myself, and I guess I did, because they hired me right out of school. Since then, the press has moved to a swell new office space, one of our writers has been nominated for a Governor General's literary award, and I've become a full-fledged member of the three-person Anvil family.

I've had many new and challenging tasks over the last few months, but my absolute favourite is reading and evaluating the fiction manuscripts as we ready them for publication. I still have plenty of proofreading and copy editing to do, especially for *subTerrain*. But because I consider myself a writer first, and an editor second, I definitely prefer substantive editing to any other kind; it's the most rewarding part of my job. I get to sit down with my boss, publisher Brian Kaufman, and discuss the manuscript—what we feel the writer is trying to communicate, where the piece succeeds and where it falls short, and what we think needs work. Our initial discussion is often followed by a face-to-face meeting with the writer. After the meeting, I usually give the writer my marked-up copy of the manuscript to take away

as a reference. Getting feedback from two editors at once is a lot to absorb in one sitting! Of course, this same process happens electronically if we're working with someone outside Vancouver.

As a writer, I try to treat all of our authors in the golden-rule style, and I've learned to deliver my critique in as constructive a manner as possible. This has also helped me avoid certain common pitfalls in my own work.

I work in an environment where my contributions are valued, and my dark sense of humour is appreciated. I love my job, because it suits my personality and my erratic schedule, and still leaves me time to pursue my fiction writing. As a contract employee, I don't have loads of job security, but this seems to be the standard in the publishing industry, where people change jobs like knickers. I'm not a millionaire, but I'm doing what I've always wanted to do.

Are we hiring? Not unless you want to fight me for it.

Jenn Farrell

Globalization

In October, the local chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC) took part in a video-linked workshop on globalization called "Regaining Control of Your Content."

Hans Fenstermacher of *ArchiText*, a translation, software and web firm based in Boston, has been in the language business for 22 years, and speaks six languages.

I was curious to find out what the term globalization means to technical writers—and because it was part of a discussion on usability, I was doubly interested.

In this context, the term refers to writing Web content that is likely to need translation.

The workshop showed how each word and subsequent translation comes at a cost. Reducing the number of words reduces the production cost significantly.

Fenstermacher pointed out that most of the e-market will shortly be outside the US, so e-marketers are missing the boat if they limit their writing to the local market.

But writing for a global market can be very expensive. The initial product is often written in English. To reduce the cost of translation at a later stage, the English version must be written using an economy of words.

Another consideration is planning to reuse original writing where possible, since one has already gone to the expense of creating such carefully crafted prose. (Note: this may raise an interesting copyright issue, as discussed earlier in this newsletter).

The workshop was presented using PowerPoint, and although we lost contact a couple of times, this use of the Internet also enabled participants to ask questions and respond to the presenter.

I now have another name, definition, and use for plain language!

David Stacey is a plain language writer and editor of CLARITY Document Design. He operates <www.quick-edit.com>, an online editing and proofreading service. You can reach him at <plainlanguage@shaw.ca>.

EAC-BC meetings are held at 7:30 PM on the third Wednesday of each month (except December, June, July, and August), now at the **YWCA Wellness Centre, 535 Hornby Street, (Hornby and Dunsmuir)** in downtown Vancouver. Non-members are welcome! (\$5 drop-in fee.) For more information, please call **604-681-7184**.

WHAT'S ON

Next Meeting
January 15, 2003

PLEASE NOTE
NEW LOCATION

YWCA Wellness Centre,
535 Hornby Street,
(Hornby and Dunsmuir)
Vancouver

Be sure to join us this month and find out from Derek Miller how to make your Web site worthwhile.

SPRING WORKSHOPS

Starting and Sustaining Your Editing Career

Are you interested in becoming an editor but not sure about how to get started? Or are you up and running, but unsure how to sustain your business? Let writer and editor Maureen Nicholson show you the ropes.

We'll look at differences between freelance and in-house editing and the skills required for effective editing, discuss strategies for finding work and promoting yourself effectively, review key editing resources and professional development opportunities, and look at how to make editing a profitable and sustainable venture.

Maureen Nicholson coordinates Douglas College's Print Futures: Professional Writing Program. She runs her own writing and editing company, Keyline Consulting, and is an associate with the Learning Strategies Group, a business education unit within Simon Fraser University's faculty of business administration.

A long-time member of EAC/ACR, Nicholson serves on the association's certification committee.

Saturday, February 22, 2003
10:30AM – 4:00PM

SFU Harbour Centre
Cost: \$79 members/\$105 non-members (includes GST)

Copy Editing

Learn the function of copy editing and its importance in the publication cycle. Assess your copy editing aptitude, learn (or review) the proper use of copy editing symbols, develop style sheets to ensure consistency, and practice on excerpts from a variety of publications.

We'll discuss the differences between hard copy and electronic editing, and how to decide when to leave things alone. This course is aimed at editors with little or no copy editing experience as well as those who want to brush up on issues specific to copy editing.

Ruth Wilson has been editing since 1981, in-house at Self-Counsel Press for 16 years, and since 1998 as an independent consultant and member of West Coast Editorial Associates. Her clients include book publishers, associations, corporations, and government. She also teaches in the SFU Writing and Publishing Program.

Saturday, March 29, 2003

10:30AM – 4:00PM

SFU Harbour Centre

Cost: \$79 members/\$105 non-members (includes GST)

For more information, please call 604-681-7184.

Next deadline for submissions to

West Coast Editor

January 10, 2003

West Coast Editor is the newsletter of the British Columbia branch of the Editors' Association of Canada. Views expressed in these pages do not necessarily reflect those of EAC/ACR as a whole.

Mailing address **Box 1688**
Bentall Centre Post Office,
Vancouver, BC V6C 2P7

Phone **604-681-7184**

Email **bc@editors.ca**

Web site **www.editors.ca/bc/bc.htm**

WEST COAST EDITOR

Editors	Lesley Cameron Rosemary Gretton
Layout	Rosemary Gretton
Copy Editors	Rosemary Gretton Sheila Smith
Proofreaders	Janice Newrick Sharon McInnis
Webmasters	Ann-Marie Metten Val Wilson
Branch Coordinator	Jean Lawrence

2002/03 EAC-BC EXECUTIVE

Chair	Faith Gildenhuis fgilden@shaw.ca
Past Chair	Winnifred Assmann wj_assmann@yahoo.ca
Book Sales Coordinator	Lynn Smith lynn_smith@shaw.ca
Communications and Hotline Co-chairs	Ricki Ewings ewingssharp@lightspeed.ca Kathryn Spracklin kaspracklin@shaw.ca
Membership	Heidi Groschler hirdaya1@yahoo.ca
Newsletter Co-chairs	Lesley Cameron lesley@4camerons.com Rosemary Gretton rgretton@telus.net
Professional Development Co-chairs	Susan Safyan ssafyan@telus.net Mark Varley mvarley@telus.net
Programs	Robert Chesterman robert@bonum.ca
Public Relations/ Industry Liaison	Curtis Foreman curtis@foreword.ca
Secretary	Ann-Marie Metten ametten@telus.net
Social/ Outreach	Paulette MacQuarrie paulette@21group.com
Treasurer	Christine Kondo ckondo@shaw.ca