

# Edition

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

MAY 2007

## As good as it gets

*Book Review of*  
On Writing Well:  
The Classical Guide to  
Writing Nonfiction

- /// The art of  
spoken English 4
- /// Professional  
development  
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**Edition**

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## *The typing life*

I REMEMBER THE AGE OF THE TYPEWRITER. I LEARNED TO type when I was 15, banging away every evening after school on my mother's Royal manual typewriter, which came in a hard grey carrying case. I sat on a chair that was way too low at a desk that was way too high. I used a typewriter for the next ten years until I got my first computer. But even then, I held on to a typewriter as a backup.

Oh, the typing life, the days when we had to get everything right the first time—no spellcheckers to save our souls, no Backspace and Delete keys. There was no Control X and Control V to move paragraphs, only scissors and tape. The big click-clacking of keys and the carriage return made us feel as if we had achieved something, perhaps unlike the pitter-patter of the computer keyboard.

According to Darren Wershler-Henry, professor of communication studies at Wilfrid Laurier University and author of [THE IRON WHIM: A FRAGMENTED HISTORY OF TYPEWRITING](#), there was the myth that the typewriter caused writers to bare their souls, that what was typewritten was dictated by a voice separate from the writer, that just as the muse spoke to Virgil and the nightingale spoke to Keats, the typewriter spoke to us.

But my muse speaks to me by hand, and in like manner I write the first draft of my book. Call it a first-hand experience, a lesson, perhaps, on how to appreciate the effort of capturing the inspiration and turning it into a labour of love. And the realization too, after the second draft, the computer will help me tell my story sooner!

*K. Ruddock*  
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# The art of spoken English

*At the March 26 general meeting, guest speaker Judy Thompson illustrated the many foibles of the English language in her energetic and passionate presentation.* **by Trudi Down**



Judy Thompson,  
ESL instructor

**W**HO KNEW A DISCUSSION ABOUT THE SPOKEN English language would be such a lively topic? Starting with the energetic and passionate presentation by guest speaker Judy Thompson and continuing through the Q & A period, the evening provided a whirlwind tour of many principles of English and many of its foibles. Thompson's thesis offered a deeper appreciation of how highly absurd spoken English must seem to foreigners.

Thompson, a Sheridan College ESL instructor, claims that spoken and written English are in fact two different languages. In her presentation she demonstrated how German, Norse, and French influence English and that is why there are many inconsistencies between spelling and pronunciation in English.

Over the years, a number of methods have been developed to help explain these inconsistencies and to assist students trying to master English. Examples of such methods include

the International Phonetic Alphabet and the keyboard phonetic alphabet. Thompson used these and other inventions in her ESL classes, but her students typically found them confusing and not much help.

While attending school in Brazil for a year as part of a Rotary International student exchange, her daughter learned to speak Portuguese fluently. This provided Thompson with her language epiphany.

"We hear words and speak them first, long before we start reading or writing," she said. Just think of how we teach our children. We emphasize speaking first: say Mommy, say ball. "Why, then, do ESL classes spend so much time on reading and writing?" she wondered. Many of her students arrive in Canada with years of grammar lessons to their credit, yet they can't speak the language well and many cannot even pronounce



commonly used words. These New Canadians simply want to be able to converse in a natural manner in all types of ordinary daily situations, she said.

While teaching English in Korea, Thompson developed a colour code system for teaching the alphabet. In effect, she has devised a different phonetic alphabet for the spoken language. The vowel chart, for example, has 17 vowel sounds each represented by a different colour. Her young students quickly picked up the subtle differences in pronunciation for the “a” in black and the “ä” sound in grey. In addition to providing the colour words, the chart gives four word examples for each sound, including two labelled “odd spelling.” Hence, the “ahh” sound is represented by the colour black, and has **MAD**, **FAT**, **LAUGH**, and **HALF** as examples.

To further support her thesis that spoken English differs from written English, Thompson offered the following:

- ▶ English is not constructed in letter-and-sound units. Pronounce the words **TEN**, **TENT**, and **NATION**. Note how the “t” is pronounced in each.
- ▶ English is made up of word phrases that go together for no particular reason; “Collocations hold English together, not grammar!” Thompson claimed. Note: blue moon.
- ▶ English is idiomatic. We say “Merry Christmas,” even though there are other synonyms that mean the same: **JOYOUS**, **HAPPY**, **GAY**, **ECSTATIC**.

▶ English is a stress-based language. (Mandarin, on the other hand, is a sound-based language.) Say: **I WOULD LIKE A CUP OF WATER**. Note the stresses. The listener hears **CUP** and **WATER**, and knows exactly what you said. To a listener, the additional words are not necessary to the understanding of the sentence.

▶ Spoken English is learned as much through body language and tone of voice as it is through vocabulary. The way we say **PARTY** and **FUNERAL** goes a long way to understanding what these words mean.

Thompson spoke about the frustration felt by instructors and ESL students trying to grasp the essentials of English through traditional classes on the alphabet, spelling, and grammar. She noted that many mistakes foreigners make in pronunciation are the result of cultural differences. For example, in Cantonese, the last consonant of a word is usually not stressed. Thus, a Cantonese learner would say “si” for “six.” Once told that the last consonant is stressed in English, the person would pronounce “six” correctly.

Thompson’s presentation, which was also available to members by Webcast, offered insights into how English is constructed, as well as amusing anecdotes on the many oddities that populate the sentences we speak. 

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*Trudi Down has been a freelance writer for over 25 years. Her company, The Corporate Word ([www.thecorporateword.com](http://www.thecorporateword.com)) creates communications pieces for both print and electronic media. [gdown@interlynx.net](mailto:gdown@interlynx.net)*

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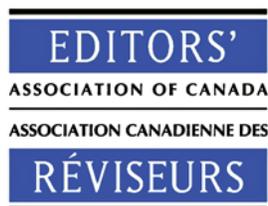
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## *The new Toronto Executive*

*On Monday, April 23, 2007, at the annual general meeting, the following were elected to the Toronto branch executive for 2007–2008.*

Branch Co-chairs—Ken Weinberg and Mary Anne Carswell

Treasurer—Ann Firth

Secretary—Lily Quan

Membership Chair—Karen Black

Public Relations Co-chairs—Noreen Shanahan and Jen Govier

Profession Development Chair—John Green

Program Co-chairs—Sandy Leppan and Patricia Bishop

Past Chair—Alan Yoshioka

Vice Chair—vacant

Newsletter Chair—vacant

## ■ For your diary pages

### Executive meeting

Monday, May 14, 2007

6:30 p.m.

EAC office, 27 Carlton Street, Suite 502

All members welcome

RSVP: Ann Firth, 905 464-6373

[toronto\\_br\\_secretary@editors.ca](mailto:toronto_br_secretary@editors.ca)

### General meeting

Monday, May 28, 2007

6:45 p.m. New members Q&A

7:30 p.m. Business meeting

8:30 p.m. Program: **Yoga for the Keyboard-Bound**

23 Prince Arthur Avenue

Members free/non-members \$5

## ■ Welcome! New members

As of April 1, 2007, the Toronto branch had 695 members (357 voting [includes 1 emeritus], 338 qualifying [formerly associate category]), including 20 student members. Thirty-nine people joined in March, twenty-four allowed their membership to lapse, and three members identified themselves as francophone. The new members are:

Jennifer Andreae

Carol Classen

Michaela Cornell

John Dowsett

Lisa Ferguson

Maren Kasulke

Phon Keomisy

Christine Langlois

Sophia McKenna

Sharon McMillan

Joanna Odrowaz

Anita Purcell

Stephen Wilsher

## Hotline Report

April 2007

Members registered

14

Clients registered

0

## 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 résumé in Directory or Hotline style. You can find guidelines to the Directory format at [www.editors.ca/hire/ode/search\\_tips.html](http://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 résumé to one page.
- ✦ If you have registered before, send your résumé 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](mailto:toronto@editors.ca) (.rtf attachment; subject: Hotline)

# May 2007 seminar calendar

*May 2007*

sun	mon	tu	wed	th	fri	sat
		1	2	Grammar Rules and Myths — Frances Peck 10:15 AM to 5:15 PM SOLD OUT	Usage Woes and Myths — Frances Peck 10:15 AM to 5:15 PM	5
6	7	8	Book Proposals — Ian Couatts 7 to 10 PM	10	11	12
13	14	15	Proofreading — Stephanie Fysh 7 to 10 PM	17	18	19
20	21	22	Proofreading (cont'd) — Stephanie Fysh 7 to 10 PM	24	25	Writing for the Web — Jane Aronovitch 9:30 AM to 4:30 PM
27	28	29	30	31		

**Grammar Rules and Myths** with Frances Peck—Thursday, May 3; 10:15 am to 5:15 pm. **SOLD OUT**

**Usage Woes and Myths** with Frances Peck—Friday, May 4; 10:15 am to 5:15 pm. Tailored for editors and other language professionals, this seminar addresses the most common and troublesome questions of word usage. Bring your questions, and be prepared for a day of lively, relevant discussion.

**Book Proposals** with Ian Coutts—Wednesday, May 9; 7 to 10 pm. This seminar focuses on the fundamentals of creating effective book proposals. According to Ian Coutts, authors should realize that a good proposal sells an idea.

**Proofreading** with Stephanie Fysh—two-evening seminar, Wednesday, May 16 and Wednesday, May 23; 7 to 10 pm. This seminar provides an overview of professional proofreading and looks at how this skill fits into the process of producing print documents of all kinds, in particular books.

**Writing for the Web** with Jane Aronovitch—Saturday, May 26; 9:30 am to 4:30 pm. There is more to writing for the Web than just writing! This seminar introduces all the elements that go into creating effective Web content, like accessibility, visual design, as well as good writing.

Don't miss the final editing seminars of the season! To register, please visit our Web page or contact the EAC Toronto branch office at **416 975-5528**.

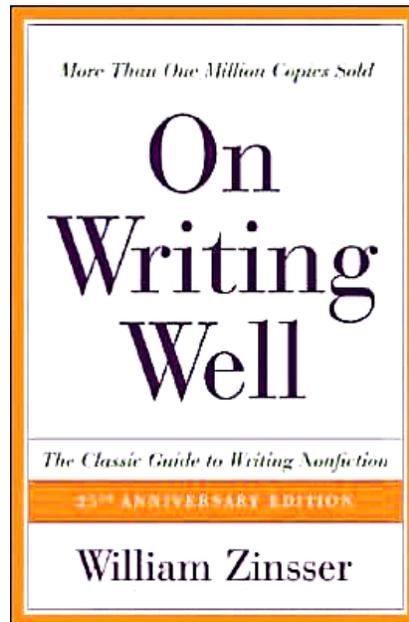
# As good as it gets

**Book review of William Zinsser's**

***On Writing Well: The Classical Guide to Writing Nonfiction***

By Noreen Shanahan

As a words person, I spend most of my time speaking. After that comes reading, then writing, then editing my own writing, and finally editing other people's writing. And, as a words person, I was therefore interested in reading William Zinsser's *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction*. I picked this book off the shelf at Indigo's a while back because—in celebration of the book's 30th anniversary—Zinsser's guide has been reprinted in a revised and expanded edition. I had read an earlier edition some 20 years ago and was curious to see what the author had learned since then: to employ a gender-neutral pronoun, to increase the visibility of women authors cited, and to be less scathing about memoirists. 



I also liked Zinsser’s more progressive pedagogical views. He now praises “intangibles that produce good writing,” such as confidence, enjoyment, intention, and integrity. He also makes space in his newest edition to ponder the once-imponderable realities that, as he put it, revolutionized the act of writing: namely, technological changes. Zinsser opens with a description of a photograph hanging over his desk in Manhattan and greeting every student who passes through his door. It’s a photo of renowned essayist E.B. White, co-author with William Strunk Jr. of *The Elements of Style*—one Zinsser encourages us to read at least once a year. In this picture, White is an old man crouched on a plain wooden bench at a plain wooden table

in a small Maine boathouse. White is typing on a manual typewriter, and the only other objects are an ashtray and a nail keg. “The keg, I don’t have to be told, is his wastebasket.”

There’s some hero-worshipping here but that’s okay with me. I also enjoy White’s prose and read him with the interest of a keen student. In fact, some of the richest parts of Zinsser’s book feature quotations from White such as the following:

“I spent several days and nights in mid-September with an ailing pig and I feel driven to account for this stretch of time, more particularly since the pig died at last, and I lived, and things might easily have gone the other way round and none left to do the accounting.” ■■■➔

*“The effortless style is achieved by strenuous effort and constant refining. The nails of grammar and syntax are in place and the English is as good as the writer can make it.”*

Zinsser’s appreciation of E.B. White runs through this book, like Charlotte’s web across the barn door. He continually points out White’s crisp, relaxed, folksy phrasing and exquisite use of language, rhythm, and tone. He dispels the common assumption that White’s style is effortless and says the opposite is true.

“The effortless style is achieved by strenuous effort and constant refining. The nails of grammar and syntax are in place and the English is as good as the writer can make it.”

Zinsser’s choice to separate chapters into small, bite-sized chunks shows a similar style to White’s. His easily digestible lessons on things like “clutter,” “style,” “words,” and “usage” make fairly accessible reading, and if consumed well, no doubt push the reader (student) towards excellence. In some chapters he describes “bits & pieces,” “scraps & morsels,” and I admit to yawning through some of these rather tiresome old tips such as using active verbs so you don’t sap your reader’s energy, making every word count, and avoiding the exclamation mark and the use of redundant adverbs. But I perked up again when he warned about the dangers of creeping nounism such as “communication

facilitation skills development intervention.”

One of my favourite “bits & pieces” found him thanking the feminist movement for revealing how sexism lurks in our language, the women readers who nudged him out of his male-gender malaise, saying they grew tired of always having to visualize a man doing the reading and writing. “And they’re right,” he says. “I stand nudged.”

I also enjoyed being reminded to read my work out loud before submitting it to an audience; this allows the writer to clear up irritations and thus hopefully keep the reader reading. Reading your work aloud, he says, makes it hold together from start to finish and also allows it to move with economy and warmth.

Zinsser tries to address, in separate chapters, many different genres of nonfiction writing such as writing about people, writing about places, and writing about yourself. He also discusses certain types of writing: travel, science and technology, humour, and sports. Another genre that received a pleasing nod from Zinsser this time around was the art of the personal essay or memoir. As tiresome as many people’s memoirs are, I found it reassuring that he included this form of 

writing, precisely because it's so popular to many novice writers, and I believe a good number of his readers are memoir-writers wanting to improve their skills.

He describes the ethical dilemma facing many writers in terms of privacy and disclosure, essentially giving them permission to head into sometimes murky emotional terrain in order to get the important story told.

"Don't worry about that problem in advance. Your first job is to get your story down as you remember it—now. Don't look over your shoulder to see what relatives are perched there. Say what you want to say, freely and honestly, and finish the job. Then take up the privacy issue."

This was thoughtful and thought-provoking. It slid inside me rather pleasantly, much more so than a few other things he suggested, such as the following: he describes the process, for him, of once spending an entire morning writing a few sentences. He tells his readers: "No writing decision is too small to be worth a large expenditure of time." I laughed out loud upon reading this. It is so hollow in its pretentiousness, its glorifying of each and every writer, making it sound as if we don't have any need to earn our daily bread just

like other people do, but can hang around on a dangling participle an entire day if we so choose. And in fact, according to Zinsser, it's what we ought to choose to do with our time, as if there's a moral imperative.

Similarly pretentious is his off-handed suggestion that in order to take your writing and your writing-self seriously, you must always be prepared to get on a plane and go after your story. "If a subject interests you, go after it, even if it's in the next county or the next state or the next country." As an example, he cited his own quest to Shanghai, and later to Venice, in order to write a couple of articles on music that were later published in [THE NEW YORKER](#). Yes, this might be the right decision for someone if, beforehand, more than one million copies of that person's "how to" writing guide have sold and have been on the market for 30 years. Otherwise, I'd suggest the writer open up her windows, block out as many distractions as possible, and write. While her baby sleeps. Or before her shift at Wal-Mart. 🌀

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*Noreen Shanahan is Public Relations Chair, EAC Toronto Branch, [toronto\\_br\\_pr\\_chair@editors.ca](mailto:toronto_br_pr_chair@editors.ca)*

## Tips, tricks, and cool Web sites

Have you exceeded your **RECOMMENDED DAILY ALLOWANCE IN CALORIES AND CARBS**? Find out from 2000 Cal. [www.2000cal.com](http://www.2000cal.com)

PC World will stop selling **FLOPPY DISKS** once the supply runs out. To transfer your many floppy files to a CD, go to [www.floppydisk.com](http://www.floppydisk.com). The cost is \$5 per CD plus shipping.

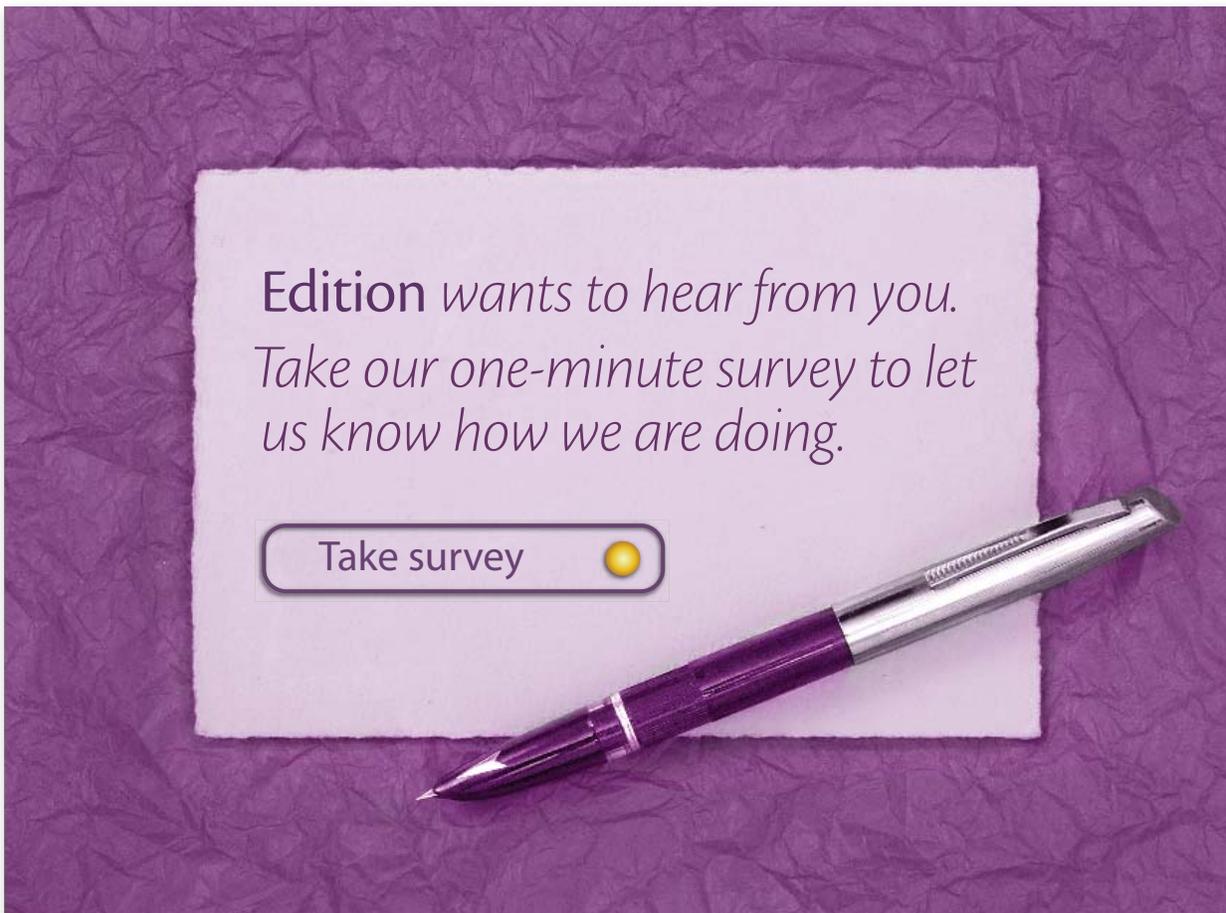
Yelo, a new **SLEEP SALON** in New York, offers 20–40 minute power naps and reflexology treatments to fatigued folks. Perhaps the concept will catch on in Toronto? <http://yelonyc.com>

Here's an idea for you: a **MAGAZINE ON A BOTTLE**. Imagine a small magazine taped inside the label of a bottle of mineral water, or on a drink bottle. Coca-Cola Belgium will be the first soft drink company to use the Magazine on a Bottle concept, producing a removable 24-page magazine. [www.onproductpublishing.com.au](http://www.onproductpublishing.com.au)

Read any **GOOD BOOKS** lately? **GOODREADS PROVIDES AN ONLINE PLATFORM** for discussing just that. Book lovers can share recommendations for their favourite page-turners with friends, online acquaintances, and other like-minded bibliophiles. Unlike the reviews found at sites like Amazon.com, Goodreads write-ups have a more personal touch since the site is built around a networking concept. [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com)

Here is a fantastic site about **INFORMATION DESIGN AND USABILITY**. Creator Jakob Nielsen's bi-weekly column on Web usability (Alertbox) often includes topics of direct interest to editors. For example, the topic for April 16 was the advantage of using numerals for numbers when writing for online readers. Even if you don't write for (or design) Web sites, the information provided about user behaviour (e.g., how different users scan Web pages, which features are most useful to the user and why, what makes an e-newsletter effective) is always fascinating. [Useit.com](http://Useit.com)

Have you heard about the **GRAMMAR GIRL**? Her real name is **MIGNON FOGARTY** and she started a podcast in July 2006 while on vacation. In her weekly podcast called "Grammar Girl's Quick and Dirty Tips for Better Writing," Fogarty doles out advice on how to use the right words in the right context. Listen to her podcast. <http://grammar.qdnow.com/>



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*Take our one-minute survey to let*  
*us know how we are doing.*

Take survey 

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[www.wenetwork.org](http://www.wenetwork.org)

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(WCDR)**

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## The lighter side of life

Speech by Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times*: “When we were young kids growing up in America, we were told to eat our vegetables at dinner and not leave them. Mothers said, ‘Think of the starving children in India and finish the dinner.’ And now I tell my children, ‘Finish your maths homework. Think of the children in India who would make you starve if you don’t.’”



*Editing should be, especially in the case of old writers, a counseling rather than a collaborating task. The tendency of the writer-editor to collaborate is natural, but he should say to himself, How can I help this writer to say it better in his own style? and avoid, How can I show him how I would write it, if it were my piece?*

—James Thurber (1894–1961),  
American humorist and cartoonist

