

EFFECTIVE EDITING

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR STUDENTS AND PROFESSIONALS

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EFFECTIVE
EDITING

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR STUDENTS AND PROFESSIONALS

GENE
MURRAY

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DEDICATION

To Susan Murray, my wife,
who has provided support,
encouragement and love
throughout the years, from
San Antonio to Ruston
and places in between.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Supplemental content for this book (e.g., exercises, discussion questions and sample quizzes) is available online at

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FOREWORD

Copyediting is for most aspiring young journalists a difficult concept to grasp; however, the author of *Effective Editing*, Gene Murray, has produced an insightful book filled with easy-to-understand exercises, examples and explanations.

Effective Editing has arrived in time to assist newspapers across the country in their quest to eagerly search for individuals who have the skills and knowledge to become successful copy editors. *Effective Editing* is a perfect asset for professional copy editors as well, inspiring them to seek internships and other experiences. It provides information concerning new trends such as convergence, online editing, and legal and ethical issues, as well as function as a style guide.

Professors who teach copyediting will be relieved to find basic grammar, spelling, punctuation and style covered in this book, with summaries and explanations concerning assignments.

Writing headlines will be easier to explain to frustrated students when using the easy-to-follow examples provided in this book. The author further provides a creative way to deal with the delicate issues of racism, sexism and ageism in our society.

The exercises and examples alone are enough to provide the skills necessary for anyone to learn. Students pursuing a career in print journalism will want to keep *Effective Editing* for future reference because it contains the essential ingredients necessary to succeed in the newsroom.

Students, instructors and professional copy editors will enjoy this book.

Sherlynn Howard Byrd, Ph.D.

Alcorn State University



PREFACE

*E*ffective Editing stresses fundamental editing tools, including grammar, spelling, punctuation and style. It also covers convergence, online editing, sensitivities, legal and ethical issues, HTML coding and preparation of news releases and broadcast copy.

The target market for this book is students and professionals in all forms of mass media — including public relations, broadcasting, online media — not just print media and newspapers. My goal was to help professors motivate students, stimulate their interests and prepare them for careers in the mass media. To this end, I have filled these pages with explanations, examples and exercises taken from real-life situations. Each chapter begins with an insightful vignette or “chapter opener” that sets the scene. The summaries at the end are followed by discussion questions and exercises that emphasize relevant material. Terms are defined in margin glossaries, and a style guide is included in the back of the book.

Although designed primarily for college courses, this book may also be useful as a reference for professional copy editors.

Effective Editing covers the editing scene from Gutenberg to gigabytes. The book opens in Chapter 1 with a discussion of the profession of copyediting and the changes that have been occurring in newsrooms. It encourages prospective editors to pursue internships and other professional experiences.

Subsequent chapters cover the fundamentals of copyediting (Chapter 2), working with words (Chapter 3), story organization (Chapter 4) and news values (Chapter 5). In Chapter 6, a copy editor explains how to take charge of copy. Chapter 7 tackles online editing and researching. Chapter 8 deals with sensitivity regarding diversity, racism, sexism and ageism.

Writing headlines can be both fun and frustrating, as demonstrated in Chapter 9, which is loaded with exercises and examples. Chapter 10, dealing with ethical and legal issues, includes discussions on libel, privacy, fabrication and other legal considerations.

Typography, photography and infographics are discussed in Chapter 11, and again multiple examples are evident. Chapter 12 opens with a brief discussion by a master designer and continues with design principles and examples. Readers will want to see the results from Eyetrack III, a study about how people read Internet stories.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank the reviewers and others whose input helped make this book possible. Special thanks go to Wanda Peters, a faculty member at Grambling State University, who combed the draft manuscript for possible errors, and to GSU alumna Emeri O'Brien for her contribution to Chapter 6. Thanks to former GSU students Michael Grant and Monica Guillory Jones for allowing their infographics to be published. And thanks to Elizabeth Arizaga for her assistance on this project.

Gene Murray
Grambling State University
Summer 2008

Proofreader's Marks

<p>BF] By James Smith [</p> <p> Daily News Reporter]</p> <p>[Spokane, Washington</p> <p>¶ SPOKANE—In 1897, before the battleship USS Maine exploded in Havana harbor artist Frederic Remington cabled Newspaper publisher Hearst William Randolph and told him the U.S. was unlikely to declare war on Spain, which at the time ruled Cuba with an iron fist. Hearst allegedly shot back: “Remington, Havana, Please remain. You furnish the pictures, and I’ll furnish the war. W.R. Hearst.” Hearst denied sending the message and historians now doubt he ever did. But many United States officials wanted the war, and Hearst’s NY Journal published many stories of Cuban misery under Spanish rule. “More than fifty journalists including 8 from the West were anxious to cover the short-lived war, media historian Joe Smith said.</p>	<p>bold face, center</p> <p>flush right</p> <p>flush left, abbreviate</p> <p>indent for paragraph</p> <p>add periods</p> <p>uppercase</p> <p>no paragraph</p> <p>lowercase</p> <p>transpose</p> <p>don’t abbreviate/spell out</p> <p>add comma</p> <p>new paragraph</p> <p>delete letter and eliminate space</p> <p>delete word and leave one space</p> <p>insert space</p> <p>remove space</p> <p>retain</p> <p>abbreviate</p> <p>add apostrophe</p> <p>don’t abbreviate</p> <p>uppercase</p> <p>use figures, insert dash</p> <p>spell out, insert dash</p> <p>insert hyphen</p> <p>insert quote marks</p>
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Chapter 1 Learning Goals

- *Copy editors are essential to tight editing, sharp headlines and compelling packaging.*
- *Almost everything appearing in print moves through the newsroom copy desk.*
- *Copy flow is the orderly processing of stories from reporters through final production. Deadlines are at the heart of this copy-flow process.*
- *Capable copy editors are in demand and are essential for advertising, broadcast news, magazines, newsletters, newspapers, public relations and online communication.*
- *Good copy editors have many qualities, personality traits and skills in common. Copy editors are good with words, and they are attentive to factual detail.*
- *Some news organizations are trying team approaches, with editors and reporters working together on stories from concept to final packaging.*



WHY BE A COPY EDITOR?

Jim Pensiero, former national copy chief of *The Wall Street Journal*, was excited and nervous because he was hiring a new copy editor. For two days, Pensiero had been examining resumes, checking references, testing applicants and giving finalists tryouts. The copyediting staff is responsible for accuracy and final content of the *Journal's* influential national section. At 1.8 million copies a day, the *Journal* has one of the largest daily circulations in the country.

The *Journal* hires five to 10 copy editors a year for its editing staff. When Pensiero was copy chief, the copy desk was staffed with 32 people. After 9/11, the *Journal* combined the Overseas Copy Desk with the U.S. Desk to form the Global Copy Desk with about 55 staffers. Generally, the copy chief interviews about 10 people per job.

What does the *Journal* copy chief look for? Copy editors are expected to check for accuracy, grammar, spelling, punctuation and style; write headlines; and rewrite stories. Pensiero, who is now the newspaper's vice president/operations and assistant publisher, said he wants people with three or four years experience. Applicants should be able to edit a long story in 20 minutes. Pensiero likes to hire professional skeptics who become the "anal retentives of the news business."

Here is what Pensiero seeks in new copy editors:



Jim Pensiero

- a broad education and good work ethic
- general knowledge
- common sense
- honesty, moral fiber and character
- ability to work under pressure
- ability to take directions
- compulsion to do good work
- ability to admit to mistakes but not dwell on them.

Copy editors at the *Journal* should be able to check math and perform currency translations. They should identify problems and discover how to fix them without taking the easy way out. Other qualities include determination, versatility, patience, perseverance, unselfishness and enthusiasm.

Pensiero likes people with native intelligence, an ability to improvise, flexibility, ambition, a desire to improve, and a willingness to take challenges without immediate payoffs. He seeks self-starters with a desire to master the craft. He values people who can identify trends and patterns. Applicants should know geography and proper reference works. Each employee must be able to adjust to what the boss wants.

To evaluate applicants, Pensiero stations prospects around the office to see how they relate to others and how well they fit with the team. He measures team spirit partly by a willingness to help others. Pensiero's work helped the *Journal* earn a Pulitzer Prize for covering the 9/11 disaster.

In this chapter, you will learn how copy desks are organized and why the skills Jim Pensiero seeks in copy editors are essential in every newsroom.

EDITING THE NEWS

STUDY PREVIEW: *Copy editors are essential to tight editing, sharp headlines and compelling packaging readers want to pick up or turn on. The most challenging copyediting is in newsrooms with strong copy desks.*

The Potential of Editing

Copy editors may not receive the star billing of ace reporters, but they are just as vital in creating exciting news products. Copy editors invigorate adequate but bland writing into stories readers can't pass up. In this book, you are encouraged to edit aggressively, recognizing that as an editor you're the last stopping point to mold a story into its most compelling form.

Sometimes copy editors do not have to turn bland stories into exciting ones because incredible events occur and dominate the news. For example, when a major bridge collapsed on I-35W in Minneapolis in August 2007, news media converged on the scene, and experts predicted how many bridges throughout the country could be unsafe. When wildfires spread in California in 2007, the media were there. When Hurricane Katrina battered the Gulf Coast two years earlier, local and network broadcast and cable outlets, the Weather Channel, newspapers and Internet sites poured forth storm-related information. Media coverage focused on New Orleans as the city went through an unimaginable situation that included flooding and failure of a levee, stranding thousands in the Superdome after the roof, air conditioning and plumbing failed, and waiting for relief and evacuation. Meanwhile, many areas around Biloxi, Miss., and Mobile, Ala., were devastated.

Some front-page headlines read:

Total chaos
Ground Zero
New Orleans nightmare

Less than a month later, Hurricane Rita, which at first seemed to aim at Houston, struck the Gulf of Mexico coast, including parts of Louisiana and Texas. Large headlines screamed:

Rita's wrath hits coast
Rita pummels Louisiana
Evacuees evacuate again

Less than a year earlier, the undersea Sumatra-Andaman earthquake occurred in the Indian Ocean on December 26, 2004. The earthquake generated a tsunami that killed more than 150,000 people, making it one of the deadliest disasters in modern history. The tsunami attracted worldwide attention.

During the 2004 hurricane season, Florida was hit with four hurricanes. Reporters could find feature stories such as a woman giving birth in a shelter and the roof being blown off an occupied shelter. *Florida Today*, located in Melbourne, informed readers through its print and online editions about storm warnings, evacuations and aftermath. On the day after a hurricane had lumbered to another area of the state, the print edition carried these headlines:

Residents expected to storm stores
Trees, roofs, signs blown away
Winds ravage Brevard beaches
Bush assumes control of gas supplies

On its floridatoday.com Web site, the lead story dealt with openings and closings of various businesses and agencies, estimated damages and the storm's course. Links on the home page led to more information ranging from schools reopening to where to get ice, gas, groceries and school supplies. Editors worked on the online and print editions, ensuring that stories were updated and that photographs illustrated the stories.

Online News Sites:
publications offering news on the World Wide Web so readers can access them through the Internet

Natural disasters and other emergency situations, such as 9/11, provide reporters and editors with opportunities and challenges to do their best work.

In headlines, which must be even more compact than lead paragraphs, effective editing makes perhaps its greatest mark. Copy editors write headlines that jump off the page, demanding: "Read me!"

Some copy editors create sophisticated graphics — sometimes beautiful, sometimes shocking — that leave lasting impressions. Armed with quick cursors, copy editors shape the final package the audience receives. They wield great power.

Editor vs. Reporter Papers

Historically, newsrooms have fallen onto a continuum with reporter papers at one end and editor papers at the other. At the most extreme, reporter papers have weak copy desks with editors who do little more than proof copy and write heads. These papers are characterized by diverse writing styles and little coordination in packaging the news. Strong editor papers, on the other hand, have clear organization and focus. Papers like *USA Today*, with crisp editing, sharp headlines and tight packaging, have unmistakable personalities.

A team of editors, tightly organized with a single-minded attention to style and presentation, is suited to create a more reader-friendly product than a newsroom whose reporters' work isn't subjected to the scrutiny, screening and discipline of a strong copy desk. Anyone who learns effective editing can work either at an editor paper, where the work is most challenging, or at a reporter paper, where the demands are less. Students seeking a career in copyediting can look for strong editor papers with either the traditional print version or online news sites. The work there is more challenging and more exciting.

Online Newspapers

With the price of newsprint continuing to escalate, many newspapers toyed with shifting to electronic delivery. By 2006, about 5,000 newspapers had online sites, with more than 3,000 in the United States. U.S. television online sites numbered approximately 1,000,

and more than 2,500 magazines in the United States were online. Some futurists foresee newspapers switching entirely to online delivery. Not only would expensive newsprint be avoided but there would be no multimillion-dollar investment in presses or worries about the paper's delivery.

Whether newspapers with ink on paper will disappear is hotly debated. Clearly, the newspaper industry is in a period of adjustment. In this book, students and professionals can find an emphasis on principles that make for good editing, both for newsprint and electronic products. The book contains dozens of examples of how fundamental principles of good editing can be applied in online and traditional newsrooms.

NEWSROOM OPERATIONS

STUDY PREVIEW: *Almost everything appearing in print moves through the copy desk. In charge is the copy chief, who supervises copy editors. Deadlines are at the heart of this copy-flow process.*

Copy Desk People

The copy desk is where the news package comes together. Stories, photos and graphics pass through the hands of copy editors, who prepare them for final presentation. Copy editors are the final gatekeepers of the news before it reaches the public.

Slot. Before computers, copyediting was completed around the rim of a horseshoe-shaped table. In the center, or slot, sat the copy chief, who handed assignments to copy editors on the horseshoe's rim. The copy chief could turn to talk to every rim person face to face. In modern newsrooms, the terms "slot" and "rim" are still used, even though copy desk people might sit at computers with desks arranged in rectangles. Most communication is conducted through computer messages.

Rim. On the rim are copy editors who edit stories for accuracy, brevity and clarity. They also craft headlines, write captions for photographs and read page proofs. In some newsrooms, someone on the rim decides how to arrange stories and photos on pages.

Gatekeeping: selection process in which reporters and editors decide which stories go in a publication or newscast

Slot and Rim: copy chief in the "slot" gives assignments to copy editors "on the rim."

Terms come from old horseshoe desk arrangement

Newsroom People

No two newsrooms are organized alike, but all copy desks fit into an organizational structure.

Chain of Command. Usually the copy chief reports to the news editor or managing editor. In large newsrooms, copy editors may work in different sections, such as news, sports or business. In some operations, a clear distinction between copy editors and reporters is hard to draw. A sports reporter, to take one example, may become a sports copy editor on certain days.

Reporters. Perhaps the most common words reporters hear from the copy desk are “Is this what you really mean?” Reporters appreciate good editing and respond readily to questions for clarification and detail. They recognize the copy editor’s job is to get stories into the best possible shape for presentation. Reporters and copy editors generally have different supervisors. When a copy editor encounters a reporter who is being a prima donna about a story, the discussion may be elevated to the supervisor level.

Photographers. In this visual age, photographers are increasingly important. On the copy desk, decisions are made concerning how to integrate photos with stories to portray the day’s events effectively. Copy editors talk with photographers about which images to run and how to display them.

Graphic Artists. Copy editors also work closely with graphic artists who create maps, graphs and charts to illustrate stories.

Compositors. At a newspaper, when the slot approves pages for production, the pages sometimes go to another department, called composing or pre-print, to be physically assembled before going to press. A copy editor serves as a liaison between the newsroom and the composing room to ensure everything works out as the desk intended.

Page Designers. Some newspaper staffs include page designers or paginators who blend elements such as text, infographics, photographs, white space and headlines onto pages in a manner designed to attract and hold the readers.

For **online operations**, copy editors post stories to online Web sites that electronic readers can access on computer monitors. This process sometimes involves condensing stories and adjusting the format for cyber-delivery. While some newspapers’

online sites still look like condensed versions of the print edition, many news organizations maintain separate online sites that are updated as news occurs.

Copy Desks

In some newsrooms, all copy goes through a single copy desk. Bigger newsrooms often have multiple copy desks, each specializing in a different section of the publication.

Universal Desk. Many newspapers have universal desks, whose copy editors handle local news, sports, lifestyle and news service stories. One advantage of universal desks is a consistent style; also, control of the copyediting process is tighter. Some copy editors like the universal desk because they get to work with a variety of stories. Other papers have a modified universal desk that handles certain sections.

Department Desk. A department desk serves an individual department, such as state, national, world, financial, sports or lifestyle. Sunday magazines almost always have separate desks. Some copy editors like to specialize in a certain subject. Some copy editors, for example, would rather be on the sports desk than anywhere else for a whole career. Others prefer features, while some like hard news, and others move around.

Combination Desk. A semi-departmentalized desk is somewhere between the universal and department system. One desk handles all copy except certain specified sections, such as sports. Some small operations have a split desk set-up, with one desk for local news and another for nonlocal stories.

COPY FLOW

STUDY PREVIEW: *Copy flow is the processing of stories from reporters through final production. The process is built around having all components in place by the final deadline so the product can reach customers on time.*

Importance of Copy Flow

Only in the movies do people yell, “Stop the presses!” Real newsrooms are driven by successive deadlines so all components come together in an orderly fashion. Deadlines assure a steady flow of content so copy editors can pace their work and meet the final

deadline. Anyone who misses a deadline can foul up the whole complex process of getting an issue out on time. The result, at worst: Customers complain that their papers are late and advertisers are upset that customers missed the word about the day's big sale.

Let's track how a story on an afternoon football game works its way through the newsroom:

- About noon, the reporter assigned to cover the game checks with the sports editor for any last-minute instructions. The sports editor has asked the photo editor to send a photographer to the stadium.
- The reporter returns to the newsroom after the game at 4 p.m. and writes the game story for the next morning's edition. While the reporter was at the game, the sports editor sketched out how the sports page will look.
- Meanwhile, the photographer provides several shots for selection.
- About 5 p.m., the sports editor reviews the story and sends it back to the reporter to clarify some details.
- The sports editor selects two photos and, considering the importance of the game, decides one will lead off the sports section. He determines their size and places them on the sports page.
- Within minutes, the reporter submits a revised version that the sports editor reads again. This time he likes it. The sports editor chooses a bold headline size that will stand out and decides to run one picture three columns wide and the other two columns wide to accompany the jumped portion of the story. The story, with the photos, goes to a copy editor on the rim.
- Following the sports editor's instructions, the copy editor writes a headline for the story, a head for the jump and captions to accompany the pictures. The copy editor catches one misused word, fixes it, and sends the story and photos to the composing room. It's now 7:30 p.m.
- Following the sports editor's instructions, the composing staff puts the story into type and fits the story and photos into the page on which it will appear. It's now 8 p.m.
- A copy editor checks with the composing staff to be sure the story and photo package is on the right page and looks like the sports editor wanted. Proofreading occurs at this point.
- With a copy editor's approval, the page is locked up and sent to the sports editor, who checks the page before sending it to final production.

Jump: a story that is continued onto another page

The copy production line has just completed a phase of the gatekeeping process, choosing what the public will see and how it is presented to them. (The example above, however, does not delineate the pagination process that occurs when a section has page

designers who plan and place various stories and art on pages.) Meanwhile, dozens of other stories and photos are flowing through the newsroom, which might be likened to an assembly line in which everything has to occur on schedule and in sequence.

HELP WANTED: COPY EDITORS

STUDY PREVIEW: *Effective copy editors are essential for advertising, broadcast news, magazines, newsletters, newspapers, online operations, public relations and technical communication. Good copy editors are in demand. Hard work and dedication to the craft pay off in promotions, advancement and job satisfaction.*

Copy Desk Shortages

Editor & Publisher (E&P), a trade magazine for the newspaper industry, carries numerous classified advertisements seeking copy editors. Here are summaries of some ads that appeared in the online version of *E&P*:

Copy Editor. *The Gardner News* is seeking a full-time copy editor for our six-day daily. The qualified candidate will have two to five years of experience as a copy/layout editor, with demonstrated abilities of producing well-designed pages together with tightly edited stories. The person we are seeking to fill this pivotal position must have a thorough command of AP style, Photoshop, and QuarkXPress. Qualified candidates are invited to send a cover letter (followed by contact information).

News Editor. *The Denton Record-Chronicle*, a member of the Belo/Dallas *Morning News* team, is searching for a talented copy editor and page designer to oversee our copy desk and design of our newspaper. Journalism degree or related field with a background in editing and reporting preferred. Previous experience on a daily, professional newspaper and prior supervisory experience are a must as are familiarity with pagination and MAC systems, especially QuarkXPress and/or InDesign. Resumes and cover letter may be e-mailed to (contact person).

Copy Editor. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, an award-winning national weekly newspaper with a daily online report, seeks an in-house copy editor for its daily publications, Sunday to Thursday, afternoons and evenings, including some late nights. Candidates should have a minimum of two years of copy-editing experience and good computer skills. Daily-newspaper experience and familiarity with *New York Times* style

are pluses. *The Chronicle* offers competitive pay as well as excellent benefits, including medical and dental insurance, a profit-sharing plan, tuition reimbursement, and five weeks of vacation a year. (The ad asks for editing samples.)

Copy Editor/page Designer. Fun in the Sun! *The Naples Daily News*, a Scripps Howard newspaper on Florida's beautiful southwest Gulf Coast, has immediate, full-time openings for news copy editors/page designers on its night universal desk. We want wordsmiths who can help us improve copy, craft excellent headlines, use art effectively and dazzle us with their creative design skills. Experience at a daily newspaper and a college degree in journalism or related field are required. Pages at the award-winning, 70,000-circulation daily are produced using the Harris pagination system and QuarkXPress. E-mail your resume and work samples, plus the telephone numbers of three professional references, ASAP.

Although good, experienced copy editors are scarce, they can be found. Where? Reporters who have acquired lots of experience on beats such as city hall might like to switch roles. Recent graduates in journalism, mass communication, English or liberal arts can become copy editors.

As news operations become more diverse, persons of diverse cultural and ethnic background are especially sought. Some media organizations, such as Dow Jones and Gannett, send recruiters to job fairs in search of talented prospects.

Career Opportunities

Opportunities are plentiful for copy editors in mass communication fields. Not all media outlets in the categories mentioned below will have job openings at the time prospective copy editors read this book, but this list may provide an idea where to start.

Newspapers. Copy editors are needed at daily, weekly and alternative newspapers throughout the United States. One of every 15 journalists employed at daily newspapers is a copy editor. In recent years, more dailies have been hiring journalism graduates straight out of college. Newspapers, overall, offer more paid internships than the other mass media.

Online services. Most daily newspapers, many broadcast operations and some weeklies operate online news sites, either as an extension of the printed version or as an independent operation. Skilled editors are needed to work with the challenging, exciting technology.

Public Relations. Copy editors are needed in public relations agencies, and departments need copy editors at institutions such as colleges, medical centers, the

Box 1.1

Internships as Gateways

Aspiring copy editors can gain valuable experience through editing internships. The Dow Jones Newspaper Fund offers about 100 internships each year, and many of those are for copy editors. Following two weeks of intensive training, interns work in paid positions with newspapers and news services throughout the country. Interns returning to college receive scholarships at the end of the summer.

Many paying internships are advertised annually by the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), which also sponsors job fairs. Internships are available with broadcast operations, magazines, advertising agencies, Internet operations and public relations firms. However, not all internships are for pay.

The ideal internship candidate is highly motivated and already equipped with many of the skills needed for the job, reported Jeff Overholtzer of Lynchburg College. He surveyed employers of news interns at newspapers, radio stations and television operations. Newspapers offer the most paid internships, with 89 percent of newspapers in the survey paying interns. Among radio stations, 17 percent paid interns, and 6 percent of TV stations offered paid internships.

Overholtzer found interns meet most employers' expectations, especially in positive attitude, motivation and getting along with colleagues and supervisors. However, many interns need more work in grammar and writing, according to the supervisors. Research skills and initiative are weak areas.

government and military services. Public relations products include written and video news releases, news advisories, speeches, annual reports, brochures and media kits.

Magazines. Each year an estimated 500 new magazines begin publishing in the United States. These magazines join thousands of other publications vying for readers' attention. Copy editors can find excitement in planning and designing creative work while performing editing tasks.

Newsletters. Editing opportunities abound in newsletters. About 4,200 subscription newsletters are listed in Newsletter Clearinghouse. The Oxford Directory of Newsletters lists 21,000 of varying types, and Gale Research Co. lists 10,000 newsletters in more than 30 subject categories. Skilled editors can profit from their own newsletters.

Advertising. Writers and editors are essential in the advertising industry. Many ad copy writers honed their sense of how to reach mass audiences in college newswriting, reporting and editing courses.

Broadcasting and Cable. Copyediting is fundamental for newscasts at the 10,000 or so AM and FM radio stations in the United States. The country also has 1,400 television stations. Instead of being called a copy editor in the broadcast industry, persons who perform those tasks usually have other titles, such as producer.

Multimedia Presentations. As technology advances, mass communication has evolved into multimedia presentations. Companies such as Dow Jones offer multimedia services that allow clients to view recent speeches and interviews and receive news updates and market reports in printed or visual format.

Technical Communication. Often overlooked are jobs in technical writing and editing. Technical writers and editors prepare manuals, proposals, company reports, marketing and training materials, newsletters, magazine articles and multimedia presentations.

Other Editing Opportunities. News services need editors, who often serve as combination reporter-editors at news bureaus in the United States and abroad. Also, editing openings sometimes occur among the 2,000 or so book publishers. Freelance copy editors can find work on various publications.

QUALITIES FOR COPYEDITING

STUDY PREVIEW: *Copy editors are wordsmiths. They are attentive to factual detail without losing the “big picture.” Their curiosity makes them lively, interesting people. Other qualities that make good copy editors include a sense of humor and enthusiasm.*

Who Are Copy Editors?

In an earlier era, someone whose interests spanned the entire breadth of human knowledge was known as a “Renaissance man.” Today, the world is too complex for anyone to be truly a Renaissance person, but copy editors come close. Their work requires them to be generalists who can competently evaluate stories on a broad range of subjects and package them skillfully, insightfully and interestingly for mass

audiences. Copy editors have quick minds and a quick wit. They are interested in their work, and that, combined with their innate curiosity, makes them fun to be around.

Kenn Finkel of the *Miami Herald* says the best copy editors come from college liberal arts programs. In the liberal arts, students are exposed to every field of human knowledge. Also, traditional liberal arts programs emphasize writing, which Finkel notes is at the heart of news work, including copyediting. Finkel, who once listed qualities that make “an almost-perfect copy editor,” recommends reading several newspapers a day, including metropolitan dailies, and also news magazines and books, both fiction and non. The proficient copy editor watches news and documentaries on television.

Careers and Personalities

Sociologists have found that some careers attract people with certain personalities. Police, for example, tend to enjoy social order. Nurses tend to be help-oriented. Most people who are happy and competent in copyediting careers share the following qualities:

Intelligence. Copy editors are knowledgeable, bright people who can fit the events of the day into a broad context. Their wide-ranging interests make them suitable for applying their knowledge to decision making. Intelligent copy editors quickly learn the system and changing technologies. Quick-witted, good copy editors catch mistakes and work with speed and thoroughness.

Pathos. Concern for others is a good characteristic for copy editors. By being empathetic and considerate, they will work well as members of a team. Being considerate means offering to help a co-worker who has a big workload with a deadline looming or simply offering suggestions when someone is stuck on a headline.

Skepticism. People who double-check facts and who insist on proof to support what they read or hear make good copy editors. An inherent curiosity prompts copy editors to ask questions and strive to tell all sides of a story.

Dependability. Copy chiefs like co-workers who arrive a few minutes early and who are willing to stay late if necessary. Promptness, punctuality and the ability to function well under deadline pressure are admirable traits.

Speed and thoroughness. Copy editors never know when they will need to do their work under extraordinary pressure. Reporters and copy editors had to react quickly and accurately following the Sept. 11, 2001 attack on the United States and natural disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, mudslides and tornadoes.

Box 1.2

News Editing Careers: A College Blend

Working on the staff of the school newspaper or magazine or for a student public relations firm, such as those organized by some Public Relations Student Society of America chapters, can be invaluable. College seniors can sharpen their skills at being interviewed and polish their resumes for job fairs, career days and on-campus visits from mass media recruiters. Potential interviewers prefer job candidates with computer skills, such as QuarkXPress, Aldus FreeHand, PageMaker, PhotoShop, Dreamweaver, FrontPage and InDesign.

Job interviewers want samples of applicants' best work. Just as writers show clippings, copy editors should save their best headlines, layouts and rewrites. Especially impressive is copyediting showing the finished product compared with the original.

Be fastidious when preparing application packages. One veteran resume reader tosses out applications with a misspelling or a misplaced comma. Sometimes she even finds her own name spelled wrong. Taking a few extra minutes to search for errors can save embarrassment or possibly spare a lost job opportunity.

One important ingredient of the application packet is the cover letter, which serves as an introduction to the potential hiring agency. Applicants should be sure the letter includes correct spellings, titles and addresses. The letter should tell about the applicant and why he or she would like to work for the company. It should explain if the applicant is seeking an internship or entry position and an availability date. A good cover letter can be the key to a career opening.

Confidence. A copy editor's confidence in her or his intelligence and skills builds with successful experiences. Consider a rookie rim person who was intimidated by a new computer system and a series of complex editing codes. He was told to write a main head, two decks, a jump head, a caption, and make a six-inch trim. After struggling silently a few minutes to figure it out, the new rimmer said to the slot, "Bob, I don't know what half this stuff means." The veteran slot man replied, "Work on what you know, and ask me questions as we work through it." The rim person was happy when he saw his work in print, and the next time he saw a long story with multiple tasks, he confidently worked it a step at a time.

Art of story telling. A copy editor has a knack for visualizing how a story will sound in a reader's mind and can judge if a reader will read past the first paragraph. The copy editor looks for smooth transitions, relevant quotes and vivid description.

Box 1.3

News Editing Checklist: What Copy Editors Do

Duties vary from newsroom to newsroom, but here is a brief look at what most copy editors do:

- Assure stories emphasize what is most important and interesting.
- Rewrite stories to add sparkle and include late developments.
- Build as much boldness and forcefulness into stories as the facts warrant.
- Tighten and polish copy, opting for short words, short sentences and short paragraphs.
- Sharpen copy, assuring architectural soundness and completeness, excising clutter, and jazzing up dull passages.
- Spot factual errors, including unsupported interpretations and unanswered questions.
- Choose photographs and crop and size them.
- Write headlines, cutlines and lift-out quotes.
- Compile briefs summarizing world, national, regional and local news.
- Fix legal problems, including libel, copyright and privacy.
- Lay out pages so they are visually enticing.
- Read completed page proofs before they go to press.

Diplomacy. A sense of diplomacy is appreciated in a business that thrives on deadlines. A person with tact can serve as a go-between in tense situations. A diplomatic copy editor can politely tell a person he disagrees without showing anger or resentment.

Sense of humor. A sense of humor can relieve tension. William Connolly Jr., deputy editor of *The New York Times*, put it this way: “Good editors are able to laugh at the absurdity of some aspects of the business — bad hours, bad tempers, bad deadlines, and bad copy — and plunge ahead.”

Flexibility. Adaptability to constantly changing situations is necessary. Copy editors must deal with regular deadlines and changing technology. Phil Currie, senior vice president for news for Gannett’s Newspaper Division, said: “Change is inevitable for our business, so we’re looking for people well versed in the basics but willing to seek new frontiers.”

Knowing how to be an active listener and how to cut to the main point are valuable skills for copy editors. These qualities contribute to sound decision making.

Skills and Techniques

Being bright and flexible and having other qualities that make for a good copy editor are not enough. Technical skills that flow from a love of the language are essential.

Language. Copy editors appreciate well-written stories in which writers use the language to tell stories interestingly. Good copy editors know grammar, spelling and punctuation and how to write headlines in monosyllables. Copy editors who have mastered the language recognize mistakes and fix them quickly. They formulate synonyms to use in headlines to avoid triteness and repetition.

News ethics. A sense of right and wrong, as well as a sense of what other people, including the audience, might see as right and wrong is indispensable.

News law. Good copy editors know the laws of libel, privacy and copyright.

Good copy editors are enthusiastic about editing. A good attitude can be the foundation for other characteristics and skills.

RETHINKING THE COPY DESK

Study Preview: *Some news organizations are trying team approaches with editors and reporters working together on stories from concept to final packaging.*

News Teams

Tim McGuire feels it's time for a change. McGuire, former editor of the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, may be right. The idea of separate chains of command for reporters and editors has been around since at least the 1930s. Says McGuire: "We've been doing it the same way for 60 years. Why are we worshipping that?" At the *Star Tribune*, the newsroom was restructured to make copy editors part of the story creation process — not just packagers at the end of the process.

The traditional newsroom had clear divisions of labor. Just like a car going through an assembly line, the news proceeded, with workers, each with a narrowly defined task, doing their parts and moving the product from assignment editor to reporter to copy editor.

The process of producing news — or automobiles for that matter — has been linear, going from concept to final product. Instead of individuals being confined to just one stage in the process, like the copy desk, the current thinking is to involve everyone at every stage. Copy editors, assignment editors, photographers, graphic artists and reporters work as news teams. Also, the thinking is that management of the process need not be top-down from the bosses. Many newsrooms have been trying new approaches to developing stories and moving them through production.

Total Quality Management

The idea of teams, called pods or circles in some newsrooms, is an adaptation of management expert Dr. W. Edwards Deming's techniques. In the 1980s, when U.S. manufacturers realized they had lost a quality edge to the Japanese, they looked to Deming's studies of Japanese production techniques. Deming's concept, "total quality management" (TQM), triggered a shift in U.S. industry to involve everyone in production, from conception to final product. A library of literature from Deming's disciples has been a common reference point for restructuring newsrooms, and some news people adopted the new techniques and learned the language of TQM.

Some people trace the origin of the team approach to an internal memo from Sheri Dill, former executive editor of the *Wichita Eagle*. In January 1994, Dill invited the entire newsroom to participate in determining how to improve the newspaper. She quoted a definition of teams offered by Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith in their book, *The Wisdom of Teams: Creating the High-Performance Organization*. They wrote: "A team is a small number of people with complementary skills, who are committed to a common purpose, set of performance goals and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable."

Dill wrote that the definition could be expanded to add that team members would be expected to help one another in developing, writing and editing stories. They would be mutually responsible for checking wires for stories related to their topic. While each member might have a specialty, all members would also consider themselves general assignment reporters. *The Eagle* in 2007 had these teams: body and soul, business, communities, crime and safety, enterprise, public life, leisure, sport and news associates. Six people were listed as copy editors for the newspaper.

Total Quality Management (TQM): concept developed by W. Edwards Deming that comprises involving everyone in all stages of production with a goal of continual improvement

“I feel that working in a team is the most satisfying of job situations,” wrote Dill in 2006. “So whatever the structure, creating a team environment yields better performance.” It’s a holistic approach that taps the ideas and creativity of every participant, giving everybody a fuller sense of ownership in the product. The result? TQM advocates say it’s a better product. With the players holding themselves mutually accountable, there is less need for supervision.

Maestro: a facilitator who gets a writer, copy editor and designer together to discuss story possibilities and fosters projects all the way through final packaging

News Team Leadership

While empowerment is nice, any human activity involving several people still needs leadership. Leland “Buck” Ryan, a University of Kentucky professor specializing in newsroom organization, makes this point with a musical metaphor:

Every newsroom needs a “maestro.” This maestro is a coordinator or facilitator who gets a writer, a copy editor and a designer together to discuss story possibilities and fosters projects to completion. Every participant is involved at every step, rather than passing the project on to the next person in the assembly line. As a project warrants, the maestro brings in other newsroom sources, almost always a photographer, sometimes additional reporters, and they too assume an ownership stake in the story.

Ryan says the old standard production line in which all stories moved through the same process was limiting. The structure of the organization drove coverage. The maestro approach is different. “If you allow everyone from the editor to the library researcher to contribute, you then let the story idea drive the organization,” he says.

Despite the aptness of the musical metaphor, Ryan’s term “maestro” hasn’t been embraced in all newsrooms. In some places people who coordinate projects are called “coordinators.” Other terms are “team leader” and “facilitator.” Where traditionalists hold strong sway, “editor” is still used.

Whatever the titles and variations, the core process of producing a news story remains the same: Conceptualization, newsgathering, concept refining, writing, shooting pictures, creating graphics, editing. With the maestro or team approach, however, every player takes responsibility for every stage in the process. Advocates say teams allow people, not structure, to drive the newsroom. This contrasts to the traditional newsroom, in which the product went from one station to the next without much coordination.

News Teams at Work

The team approach has many variations. Most experiments have involved teams for projects, but some newsrooms have gone totally to news teams. In the most avant-garde newsrooms, traditional beats, in which reporters covered designated areas, usually alone, have given way to broad subject areas. So have separate staffs for separate sections. *The Orange County Register*, for example, has a Southern California Culture team, which develops stories to “sell” to section managers. It generates stories for news, sports, business, features and other sections.

Here is a sample of teams at a number of newspapers:

911 Jump team. This team at the *Norfolk Virginian-Pilot* responds quickly to breaking stories.

Public Life team. This team at the *Dayton Daily News* in Ohio takes a more expansive approach to what once was called government and politics beats.

Kansas Roots. *The Wichita Eagle* looks to this team for out-of-state and statewide coverage.

Global team. *The Norfolk Virginian-Pilot* wire desk once had the assignment of fitting foreign news into the paper, but now the Global Team scans the wires for localizing foreign developments in sports, business, politics, and other topics.

Government and Common Good. At the St. Paul *Pioneer Press* this group works to relate government to the readers, rather than merely chronicling government events.

In other newsrooms with teams, copy editors work with reporters and others in wide-ranging subjects with varying labels:

- Body and Soul
- Consuming and Money
- Panic and Phobias
- Public Life

STAYING IN TOUCH WITH THE AUDIENCE

STUDY PREVIEW: *Copy editors are vital in making sure coverage meets the audience's needs and interests. One approach is stronger audience involvement in the news product, an approach being called public journalism or civic journalism.*

One “old” idea about newspapering was to give the readers what the editors thought they needed, not necessarily what the readers wanted. As media competition intensified, newspaper people worked to ascertain what readers wanted to see in their publications. Satisfied readers often become habitual consumers of the newspapers.

To an outsider, copy editors seem to have an uncanny sense of how readers will accept stories. There is, though, no magic involved. Editors work methodically to know their audiences so they can be in touch with what people want to know. A good editor should know the audience so well that every question a reader might pose is anticipated, and the answer is included in the story.

Surveys. Some news organizations survey readers and viewers to determine likes and dislikes. Some newspapers have sophisticated in-house research units whose assignments include tracking audience interests. Other newspapers bring in university researchers and private consulting companies for audience ascertainment studies.

Focus Groups. In some communities, newsroom people, sometimes including copy editors, meet regularly with community groups to ascertain what the audience wants and needs. At the *Bloomington (Ind.) Herald-Times*, editors learned from focus groups that readers didn't want hard-to-prepare gourmet recipes on the food page, so the paper switched to healthy dishes that could be prepared quickly. Focus groups like those at the *Herald-Times* help newsroom staffs keep in touch with changing reader interests. By listening carefully and balancing what they hear against their own experience and sense of what should be reported, copy editors can help craft coverage that meets audience needs.

What do most readers want? Surveys say it's news focusing on them and where they live. They want to know what's happening in the state, nation, and the rest of the world. They like color and graphics but not a lot of fancy designs. They like practical information they can apply to their daily lives. They want weather information and news of discoveries and inventions.

Box 1.4

Internet Sites for Internships

You can look up internship opportunities at these Internet sites:

American Public Health Association
<http://www.apha.org/journal/nation/tnhintern.htm>

American Society of Newspaper Editors
<http://www.asne.org/>

Associated Press
<http://www.ap.org/apjobs/internship.html>

Corporation for Public Broadcasting
<http://www.cpb.org/jobline/>

Dow Jones Newspaper Fund
http://djnewspaperfund.dowjones.com/fund/cs_internships.asp

Journalismjobs.com
<http://www.journalismjobs.com>

Public Relations Society of America
<http://www.prsa.org>

Detroit Free Press
<http://www.freep.com/jobspage/interns/fpintern.htm>

Fox Broadcasting Co.
<http://www.foxcareers.com/>

Gannett
<http://www.gannett.com/job/jobs/youngprofessional.htm>

Harper's
<http://www.harpers.org/HarpersInternships.html>

Institute for Humane Studies
<http://www.theihs.org/subcategory.php/24.html?menuid=3>

Kaiser Health
<http://www.freep.com/jobspage/interns/kaiser.htm>

Landmark Communications
<http://www.landmarkcom.com/employment/intern.php>

National Public Radio
<http://www.npr.org/about/jobs/intern/>

Public Broadcasting System
<http://careers.wgbh.org/internships/internships.html>

Turner Broadcasting System
http://www.turner.com/careers/college_students.html

Washington Post
http://washpost.com/news_ed/summer_internships/index.shtml

WCPO Cincinnati

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Copy editors are essential for high-quality print and online publications, and copyediting as a career can be challenging and rewarding. It is also fun.

People preparing for copyediting careers tend to be well-rounded, informed college graduates with varied interests. To succeed, they need a curiosity about what is going on in the world. Good copy editors are in demand, and career opportunities are available in newspapers, public relations, magazines, technical writing, advertising, newsletters, online communication and multimedia presentations.

As part of a newsroom team, copy editors work under deadline pressure, usually starting as a rim person reporting to a slot or copy chief. Copy desks are arranged according to functions and size of the publications.

Copy editors usually are the last people to look closely at stories flowing through the system. Stories start as an idea or an assignment and are developed into news by reporters. Copy editors refine and polish copy and ensure it's accurate, clear and complete. They make sure all parts of a story package are appropriate: headline, story, and sometimes photograph, caption or infographic. Copy flow can be compared to an assembly line with the copy editors serving as quality control.

In recent years, newspaper people have been rethinking the concept of copy desks and have restructured their staffs into teams with the idea of producing a better product and serving readers better. Copy editors become part of a team, and reporters and copy editors even switch roles sometimes, providing copy editors input early in the news flow process. Another idea involves maestro newsrooms in which the person in charge directs small teams of reporters, editors and visual people toward goals. These concepts allow copy editors more say in planning, production and presentation of stories. The idea behind these changes is to serve the audience, retain regular readers, attract some "at risk" readers and appeal to hard-core nonreaders.

New sensitivity in many newsrooms adheres to the principle that journalists need to please the audience. Newsroom people, including copy editors, interact with audiences through focus groups, advisory councils and surveys. The goal is to establish and maintain two-way communication with the community.

For Further Reading

ASNE, "Why Choose Journalism? A Guide to Determining if a Career in Newspapers Is Right for You," <<http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?id=2>>.

“Deming's Principles of Total Quality Management (TQM),”
<<http://www.well.com/user/vamead/demingdist.html>>.

D. Samson and M. Terziovski, “The Relationship Between Total Quality Management Practice and Organisational Performance,” *Journal of Operations Management*, 17(4): 393-409 (June 1999).

Leland B. Ryan and Michael O'Donnell, *The Editor's Toolbox* (Ames, Iowa: Blackwell Publishing, 2001).

Chapter 2 Learning Goals

- *Correct spelling increases credibility among readers and prevents embarrassment for reporters and editors.*
- *Spelling tips, like the “i” before “e” rule, are useful. So are guidelines on suffixes, double consonants and common misspellings.*
- *Copy editors prefer sentences written in the S-V-O (subject-verb-object) sequence, active voice, proper structure and varying sentence length because they are easier to read or listen to.*
- *Copy editors fix stumbling blocks such as sentence fragments, fused sentences, misplaced modifiers and dangling construction. Relying on style guides, copy editors determine correct punctuation.*
- *Copy editors can use readability formulas to let writers know if they are following basic writing principles, such as using short, simple, familiar words and varying sentence length and construction.*



FUNDAMENTALS OF EDITING

Coach Leon Barmore of the Louisiana Tech Lady Techsters might have thought somebody was playing an April Fool's joke.

The plaque naming him national women's basketball coach of the year, presented at an April 1 banquet, stated:

Leon Barmore, Louisiana Tech,
National Women's Freshman of
the Year

The award was from the U.S. Basketball Writers Association, and apparently someone failed to check the facts and spelling before the presentation.

Sports writers everywhere chuckled, pointing out the errors to their readers. In Barmore's hometown of Ruston, La., the sports editor wrote Barmore still had his jump shot but certainly didn't have any playing eligibility left.

One columnist speculated, jokingly, that former Vice President Dan Quayle had found a job with the Basketball Writers Association. Quayle once had gained infamy for spelling potato "p-o-t-a-t-o-e."

Copy editors guard against misspelled words to prevent the embarrassment of the sort the Basketball Writers Association garnered. More important, wrong spelling impedes communication. It also signals a sloppiness that undermines audience confidence in not only a particular story but the whole news package.



Leon Barmore

In this chapter, you will review the rules literate people have devised over the centuries to make the language a tool for effective communication.

SPELLING

STUDY PREVIEW: *Correct spelling increases credibility and prevents embarrassment for copy editors. One technique to improve spelling is to look, listen and practice, otherwise called the Three S's: see, sound and sense.*

Credibility and Embarrassment

Even with spelling software on newsroom computers, misspelled words can still creep into print or onto the airwaves. Just as embarrassing are words that are spelled correctly but used improperly.

Imagine Coach Barmore receiving a “plague.” How about a caption that points out the main person is accompanied by a “fiend”? Such errors slip past computer spell-checkers. It’s the copy editor’s job to spot incorrect spellings and fix them. Readers may chuckle at laughable misspellings, but news isn’t a comic enterprise.

Caption: explanatory information accompanying a photograph or illustration; also called a cutline

One downside of misspelling is that every wrong word raises doubts about not only your spelling ability but also your attention to detail. Words are to editing as hammers are to carpenters, and nobody wants to live in a poorly hammered house.

Misspelling raises doubts about credibility. It’s not unreasonable for someone in the audience to spot a misspelled word and remark: “If the *Daily Bugle* is sloppy with words, maybe the *Bugle* also is sloppy with facts and the truth.”

Although misspellings glare out in the printed word, don’t think for a moment that they are any less hazardous in broadcasting. While viewers and listeners don’t see misspellings in a script, mangled words show up if the announcers stumble over them. We’ve all heard announcers flustered and embarrassed when their tongues trip.

Remember too that television is more than a spoken medium. On-screen streamers and background art carry words whose spelling is important. Imagine viewers who see the mayor’s name misspelled on a streamer during an on-camera interview. They will be distracted, perhaps so much they won’t hear a thing she says.

Some spelling errors linger in the minds of audience members. Imagine, as a copy editor, being haunted by a bad word in promotional brochures with a long shelf life or an annual report or a yearbook.

Improving Spelling

Copy editors can improve their spelling by applying the Three S's: Seeing, sounding and sensing.

Seeing. Someone once said if a word looks “phunny,” look it up. That’s good advice if you have the slightest doubt about a word. Not only will you get the word right by checking a dictionary or other reference book, but also you will know the correct spelling the next time you encounter the word.

Sounding. Sound out the word by saying it and then spelling it out loud. Break it into syllables, being careful not to omit or add letters. Ask yourself if you have been pronouncing the word properly. Be aware of silent letters.

Sensing. Find out what the word means and make up a sentence including it. This might seem like a high-school vocabulary word assignment, and it is. If it worked back then, it will work now. When we know words well, we use and spell them correctly.

SPELLING TIPS

STUDY PREVIEW: *The English language has a rich heritage, which makes it impossible to rely on a handful of spelling rules. Even so, some guidelines are useful.*

“T” Before “E”

In grade school you might have memorized this old spelling rhyme:

Put “i” before “e,”
Except after “c”
Or when sounding like “a,”
As in “neighbor” and “weigh.”

It's a good rhyme that has helped generations of people with the troublesome "i-e" and "e-i" combinations.

- "I" Before "E" Words: believe, niece, relief, wield
- After "C" Words: deceive, receive
- Sounds Like "A" Words: eight, freight, sleigh
- Exceptions: either, foreign, seize, weird

Suffixes

Suffixes, those pesky letters added to the ending of a word to give it a specialized application, can be puzzling. These rules help:

Suffix: a group of letters added to the ending of a word to give it new or added meaning

- **Silent "E".** Usually drop a final silent "e" when adding a suffix beginning with a vowel:

arrive: arriving	irrigate: irrigating
perspire: perspiring	remove: removing

The final "e" is kept if the suffix begins with a consonant:

hope: hopeful	enhance: enhancement
love: lovely	waste: wasteful

An exception, according to Associated Press style: judgment — without the "e."

- **"Y" Words.** When adding "s" or "d" to nouns and verbs ending in "y," generally change the "y" to "ie" when the "y" follows a consonant.

carry: carried, carries	dory: dories
marry: married, marries	remedy: remedied, remedies

But don't change the "y" when it is preceded by a vowel:

monkey: monkeys	decoy: decoys
Tuesday: Tuesdays	

Among exceptions: Emmys, Grammys (awards)

- **Plurals.** Add "s" to form plurals of most nouns.

book: books
squad: squads

grump: grumps

For nouns ending in “ch,” “s,” “sh” and “x,” add “es”:

church: churches
bush: bushes

cross: crosses
fox: foxes

- **Joined Words.** When two words are joined, keep all their letters:

overdo
otherwise

overdue
citywide

- **“-able.”** The suffix “-able” is used more often than “-ible,” and it is used mostly with complete root words. The root words usually can stand alone without the suffix:

affordable
dependable
adaptable

expandable
enjoyable

The suffix “-able” follows the hard “k” and soft “g” sound:

breakable

changeable

- **“-ible.”** The suffix “-ible” usually follows double consonants and “s”:

terrible
divisible

sensible

The “-ible” suffix also follows some soft “c” and “d” sounds:

forcible

incredible

Double Consonants

When the last consonant in a one-syllable word is preceded by a single vowel, double the consonant when adding a suffix beginning with a vowel:

nap: napped, napping

fret: fretted, fretting

Also, if the consonant ends a stressed syllable, double the consonant before adding the suffix ending with a vowel:

admit: admitted, admitting occur: occurred, occurrence

Memory Aids

Whenever you hear a mnemonic device for spelling a word, remember it. Here are some helpful memory aids:

a lot:	Too much for a single word
all right:	Alright is not all right
accommodate:	A word big enough to accommodate two “c”s and two “m”s
accumulate:	has one “m” less than accommodate
baccalaureate:	The graduate made two “c”s.
battalion:	To battle a lion, you need two “t”s.
calendar:	Remember an “a” each day.
cemetery:	There are “a”s in graveyard but not cemetery.
defendants:	Defendants have ants.
dependents:	There are three “e”s in dependent.
embarrass:	It’s embarrassing to omit an “r.”
harass:	Keep harassment to a minimum with one “r.”
liaison:	It takes two “i”s to liaison.
lieutenant:	Do lieutenants lie?
millionaire:	Someone that rich can afford two “l”s but only one “r.”
murmur:	Please repeat your “mur.”
principal:	The principal is your “pal.”
principle:	A principle is a “rule.” Both words end in “le.”
questionnaire:	Use two “n”s to air your feelings.
recommend:	I see you recommend M&Ms.
sergeant:	Police sergeants wear serge uniforms.
separate:	There’s a rat in separate.
theater:	In the United States, it’s “the-ate-r.”
weird:	We are weird.

Say tricky words out loud, exaggerating the difficult syllable, and your ear will help you spell it right:

cal en DAR	con ver TI ble
de fin I NITE	prom I nent
pro NUN ci ation	

Box 2.1

Frequently Misspelled Words

Here is a list of frequently misspelled words that sometimes give copy editors headaches:

abbreviate	disease	niece
abduct	donor	occasion
abscess	dormitory	opportunity
absence	ecstasy	pamphlet
accelerate	environment	parallel
accelerator	equipment	pastime
accommodate	exhibit	prophet
accumulate	February	prostate
acquiesce	feud	psychology
acquire	fictitious	questionnaire
across	fiery	quizzes
adjacent	foreign	receipt
aisle	genius	recommend
Albuquerque	grammar	relieve
alcohol	Halloween	rhythm
all right	harassment	roommate
analyze	height	satellite
anonymous	hemorrhage	scissors
ascent	hygiene	sergeant
athlete	icicle	sheriff
athletics	impromptu	silhouette
attendance	incredible	simultaneous
bachelor	innocence	sophomore
balloon	judgment	souvenir
beginning	kidnapping	spontaneous
believe	knowledge	subpoena
benefited	laboratory	Tallahassee
brochure	liaison	Tennessee
burglar	license	truly
business	lightning	ubiquitous
caffeine	Louisiana	vacuum
calendar	marijuana	vegetable
cemetery	Massachusetts	vehicle
changeable	mediocre	Wednesday
Cincinnati	miniature	weird
Connecticut	miscellaneous	wield
convenient	naive	wiener
defendant	necessary	xenophobia
diarrhea	neutral	yield

Box 2.2

The Spell Checker Can Miss Errors

The spell checker is a helpful tool for copy editors, but it can let some wrong words slip through. For example, the following sentence will pass with no errors: Thee spill cheater in a hopeful towel from coy editors, butt if came stall lot same wring wads. Short, similar words such as *in*, *if* and *is* can be overlooked by the spell checker but caught by a careful copy editor.

Box 2.3

Similar Words

Copy editors are alert for words such as these with similar sounds but different meanings.

accept:	a verb meaning to receive
except:	a preposition meaning excluding; all but
affect:	a verb: to produce a change, to influence
effect:	a noun: result of a cause; verb: to bring about
aid:	assistance
aide:	person who serves as an assistant
cite:	a verb: to quote as an authority or example
site:	a noun: a particular place
sight:	a noun: ability to see; verb: to see
compose:	to create or put together
comprise:	to contain, to include all or embrace
it's:	a contraction of it is
its:	a possessive pronoun: belonging to it
lay:	action verb with direct object; to place
lie:	state of reclining; no direct object
loose:	an adjective: not securely attached
lose:	a verb: to be deprived of, opposite of win
principal:	an adjective: most important; a noun: head of a school
principle:	a noun: a fundamental truth
their:	a possessive pronoun: belonging to them
they're:	a contraction of they are
there:	an adverb: that place or position
you're:	a contraction of you are
your:	a possessive form of you
who's:	contraction for who is
whose:	possessive meaning an object belongs to someone

Some words have more than one spelling, but communicators seek the right one. Which to choose? Check your newsroom stylebook. Don't rely on your computer's spell-check function unless it is programmed to your newsroom's style. Spell-check programs let you know merely if a word is a word, not whether it's AP style or what your stylebook specifies.

SENTENCE STRUCTURE

STUDY PREVIEW: *Copy editors prefer sentences written in the S-V-O sequence, active voice, proper structure and varying sentence length because they are easier on readers and listeners.*

S-V-O Sequence

A simple sentence begins with a subject followed by a verb. For example:

Tim Duncan scored (subject/verb).

Sometimes an object follows:

Tim Duncan scored 38 points.

This subject-verb-object sequence is the most common in the English language. S-V-O sentences are clear and direct: The person doing the action is the subject.

Reversing the order (O-V-S) loses effect:

Thirty-eight points were scored by Duncan.

Not every S-V-O sentence need be five words or fewer; many are combinations of S-V-Os connected by coordinating conjunctions. By deviating too far from the S-V-O approach, writers may gain variety but lose effectiveness.

Here is an example of going too far from S-V-O approach:

There is a strong reason to believe that the burglar who has been breaking into Orangeville homes is one man, said Police Officer Ronni Rogers.

Copy readers are on guard for sentences not written with the S-V-O approach, and they try to improve them or ask reporters to revise them. Although most sentences are written in the S-V-O format, some varying of structure gives the reader some variety.

Active/Passive Voice

Active verbs are key in effective S-V-O writing. Verbs in the active voice have the subject doing the action:

Miller's truck hit the telephone pole.

In the passive voice, in contrast, the subject receives the action and lessens the impact:

The telephone pole was hit by Miller's truck.

Copy editors guard against needless shifts from active to passive voice without warning the reader. A good rule is to use the active voice unless you have a good reason to choose the passive. Read the two above examples out loud and you will hear the difference. The difference between active and passive sentence construction can be summed up as follows:

Active Voice: when the verb is in the active voice, the subject is acting on the verb

Passive Voice: when the verb is in the passive voice, the subject is receiving the action; the verb is passive

Active sentence construction:

Who did what to whom/what

Passive sentence construction:

What had what done to it by whom/what

Passive sentences often can be spotted because they contain auxiliary verbs such as “has” or “was.” The person performing the action often disappears from passive voice sentences. After finding the action verb in a sentence, copy editors can determine who performed the action. Then the copy editor can reconstruct the sentence so that the doer performs the action. Notice the action sentence compared to the alternative passive:

Active: A searcher today found a voice recorder from a jet that crashed into a swamp two weeks ago.

Passive: A voice recorder from a jet that crashed into a swamp two weeks ago was found today.

Here is another example of a sentence transformed from passive to active:

Passive: Mt. St. Helens was viewed by the tourists from Ohio.

Active: The Ohio tourists viewed Mt. St. Helens.

Parallel Structure

If we had written that the tourists viewed Mt. St. Helens in Washington state, rode burros in the Grand Canyon and had been buying souvenirs in San Francisco, readers might find the passage difficult. Why? Because it is not parallel.

Presenting ideas in parallel manner gives a sense of orderliness and rhythm. Items in a series should all be nouns, gerunds, phrases or clauses. Verbs in a series should have the same tense, voice and mood.

Here is one remedy for the sentence:

The tourists viewed Mt. St. Helens in Washington State, rode burros in the Grand Canyon and bought souvenirs in San Francisco.

Another possibility is a bullet list:

On their Western swing, the tourists:

- viewed Mt. St. Helens in Washington state.
- rode burros in the Grand Canyon.
- bought souvenirs in San Francisco.

Each bulleted item can be considered a conclusion to the same sentence. Keep the grammatical construction the same. Note how the verbs are in past tense, followed by the objects and the prepositional phrases.

Varying Sentence Length

News stories are usually brief and to the point. Too many short sentences, however, become choppy and irritating:

See Dick run. See Jane run. Hear Spot bark.

To avoid a simplistic effect, vary sentence length to retain the interest of readers, listeners or viewers.

Short sentences are best suited to factual statements, while longer sentences are good for detailed descriptions, explanations and information to defend arguments.

By using active voice and S-V-O construction, reporters and copy editors can save words and give more life to stories. When you find too many short sentences, condense by turning one of the sentences into a dependent clause or phrase and combining it with another. You can combine two sentences by changing the word order or eliminating redundancies or wordiness.

Here is an example of two sentences combined for smoother reading:

Before: Police are looking for a man who robbed the Bank of America downtown branch. The branch was robbed about noon today.

After: Police are looking for a man who robbed the Bank of America downtown branch about noon today.

For variety, writers and copy editors can vary beginnings of sentences or transpose verbs and subjects.

This lead contains 16 words:

SAN ANTONIO — Felix Rivera's late-night craving for a cold brew bought him a ticket to the cooler.

In varied-length sentences, the writer used six short paragraphs to explain Rivera's predicament about getting stuck in a rooftop air vent while trying to sneak into a convenience store to grab a beer.

SENTENCE STUMBLING BLOCKS

STUDY PREVIEW: *Copy editors fix stumbling blocks such as sentence fragments, fused sentences, misplaced modifiers and dangling construction.*

Fragments

Sentence fragments creep into stories because they resemble sentences. They begin with a capital letter and often end with a period. However, they usually lack a subject or a predicate or both. They may be dependent clauses separated from their independent mates. Here is an example of a fragment (a dependent clause):

Sentence Fragment:
group of words that does not make a complete sentence

Because he did not like some of the amendments.

Here is a complete sentence (an independent clause):

President Bush vetoed the bill.

A copy editor can join this fragment with the sentence by replacing the period with a comma:

Because he did not like some of the amendments, President Bush vetoed the bill.

Sometimes a verb is missing, possibly because of a typing error:

Stella waiting for her plane.

Inserting a helping verb gives us a complete sentence:

Stella is waiting for her plane.

Most sentence fragments can be fixed by:

- changing punctuation to attach the fragment to another sentence.
- adding a missing subject, verb or another word.
- combining the fragment with an independent clause.

Some sentence fragments are intentional to add emphasis — and they work. Copy editors ask if the fragment adds to the story or confuses the audience. Fragments should be used sparingly.

Fused Sentences

Another sentence stumbling block is the fused sentence, sometimes called a “run-on sentence.” It combines two or more sentences without punctuation between them. Often such punctuation accidents are caused by writers who are excited, careless or rushed while chasing deadlines.

Here is an example of a fused sentence:

The women’s team won the men’s team lost in overtime.

Most fused sentences can be fixed by separating the statement:

Fused Sentences: two or more sentences without punctuation between them; sometimes referred to as a run-on sentence

The women's team won. The men's team lost in overtime.

Another solution is to add a coordinating conjunction:

The women's team won, but the men's team lost in overtime.

Other ways to correct run-on or fused sentences are to:

- connect the two clauses with a semicolon.
- subordinate one clause to the other.
- join the two clauses with a semicolon followed by a conjunctive adverb, such as however.

Here is an example of connecting two clauses with a semicolon:

Original: The theater was sold out everyone wanted to see the Harry Potter movie.

Changed: The theater was sold out; everyone wanted to see the Harry Potter movie.

To subordinate one clause to another is shown in this example:

Because everyone wanted to see the Harry Potter movie, the theater was sold out.

Comma Splices

Related to fused sentences and run-on sentences are comma splices or “comma faults.” Splices occur when writers connect two or more independent clauses with a comma. An example of a comma splice follows:

Jesse Jackson attended the memorial service, Hank Aaron also attended.

Comma Splice: occurs when writers connect two or more independent clauses with a comma; also known as a comma fault

This statement could be fixed like this:

Jesse Jackson and Hank Aaron attended the memorial service.

Not all comma splices are so simple. Here is another comma splice example:

Errol Flynn was a dashing movie star, he never won an Oscar.

Here are some ways to fix the problem:

- Add a coordinating conjunction after the comma. (Seven coordinating conjunctions can be remembered by using the memory device FAN BOYS: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so):

Errol Flynn was a dashing movie star, but he never won an Oscar.

- Make two sentences:

Errol Flynn was a dashing movie star. He never won an Oscar.

- Subordinate one clause to the other:

Although Errol Flynn was a dashing movie star, he never won an Oscar.

Misplaced Modifiers

A few words in the wrong place can cause problems for copy editors. Misplaced or dangling modifiers are words, phrases or clauses that appear to modify the wrong word, phrase or clause instead of whatever they were supposed to modify. Here is an example of a misplaced modifier:

Once frosted, Martha placed the cake into a glass case.

“Frosted” modifies “Martha” instead of the cake as the writer intended.

Here is one solution:

After frosting the cake, Martha placed it into a glass case.

To avoid audience confusion and to ensure clarity, copy editors check if words, clauses and phrases are placed close to the words they modify.

Adverbs are easily misplaced because they can appear in several places within a sentence. Adverbs usually fit best directly before or after the words they are modifying.

Misplaced Modifiers:
words, phrases or clauses that appear to modify the wrong word, phrase or clause; also called “dangling modifiers”

Danglers

A participle phrase is a group of related words beginning with a participle, which usually ends in “-ing.” Dangling participle phrases can cause confusion and maybe smiles if allowed to reach the audience:

Taking our seats, the movie began.

Returning to his hometown, 16 years had elapsed.

Other groups of words, such as prepositional phrases, can cause confusion if misplaced. Consider this example:

The witness claimed through his back window he could see the robbery.

The prepositional phrase could be moved to the end of the sentence for clarity:

The witness claimed he could see the robbery through his back window.

Copy editors look for awkward placement of long phrases and clauses that interrupt the flow of a story. By placing modifiers close to whatever they are supposed to modify, copy editors reduce confusion and improve the flow and pace of sentences.

Occasionally, readers or listeners are left dangling by sentences like this one:

Anna’s mother told her she could not go.

Who was not going — Anna or her mother?

Sometimes copy editors clear up such statements simply by checking with the reporter.

Dangling Participle: a group of words beginning with a participle, but not placed near the words the participle phrase modifies

PUNCTUATION

STUDY PREVIEW: *Relying on a style guide and experience, copy editors select correct punctuation.*

Working with Punctuation

A good knowledge of grammar and style includes punctuation. If you can recognize clauses, phrases, incomplete sentences and full sentences, you are on your way.

Although readers take punctuation for granted, it is necessary to guide readers through stories. Periods signal to stop, while semicolons or commas mean slow down. Various other punctuation marks also assist readers. This text's style guide has a punctuation section for easy reference.

Periods. The most common use for periods is to end declarative sentences. The period also has uses that are not always obvious. Here is an example of a period at the end of a sentence:

The mayor announced she will not seek re-election.

Some sentences are orders or requests. These are imperative sentences:

Be here at 7 a.m. sharp.

Check my car's radiator.

Periods are used in abbreviations. When in doubt about style, copy editors check their stylebook. Some examples:

345 Sunset Blvd.	U.N.	Dr.
7:39 a.m.	U.S.	Ph.D.
Lexington, Ky.	Jr.	Lt. Col.

Periods separate dollars from cents:

\$2.99	\$12.98	\$202.02
--------	---------	----------

Periods also indicate fractions of seconds in some athletic events, especially races:

3.7 seconds (The seven is a 10ths of a second.)

22.34 (The 34 represent 100ths of a second.)

Ellipses. An ellipsis — three consecutive dots (...) — indicates a writer or editor omitted some words. There is a space before or after ellipses when they come right before or after a period. When some audience members see ellipses, they wonder what has been left out. Some writers use them in quotations to indicate a pause. This makes the ellipsis ambiguous, and audience members wonder whether something has been omitted or if there was a pause.

Here is an example of an ellipsis in a quote:

Morris' lawyer indicated "we plan to appeal ... we must examine our options."

If the ellipsis is between two sentences, use three periods plus the one there already, making four periods in a row:

Investigators continued searching for pieces of the ship's wreckage. ... The hijackers are presumed dead.

Commas. In addition to creating a pause, the comma adds clarity. Sentences and stories can suffer from lack of commas, too many commas and misplaced commas.

- Commas are used to separate items in a series:

The nominees included Albritton, Breaux and Culbertson.

- According to the AP style guide, if there is a conjunction before the last item in the series, then the comma before the conjunction is omitted, as in the above example. However, if there is an "and" in one of the final two items in the series, then the comma must remain to avoid confusion.
- Another use for commas is to separate two independent clauses connected by a coordinating conjunction, if the clauses don't contain a lot of internal punctuation. Here is an example:

More police cars were visible over the holiday weekend, and the number of accidents decreased.

- Commas are used after "said" when introducing a direct quote:

The candidate said, "I favor a plan that will create more jobs."

- Commas are used before and after a state following a city:

Brown and Green met in White Plains, N.Y., at the Blue Note Cafe.

- When there is a complete month and year in a sentence, commas set off the year:

On April 18, 1937, Willie Morris was born.

- Commas are used after introductory clauses, phrases or words in a sentence:

The council approved the annexation, but the mayor vetoed it. (The comma comes after the introductory clause.)

Jumping from the fifth-floor balcony, Perez landed on a trampoline on the lawn. (The comma comes after the phrase.)

Often, I sit watching the ocean. (The comma comes after the introductory word.)

- Commas are used before the adverbs “too” and “also” at the end of sentences:

Dr. Landis planned to attend the symposium, too.
Jeffrey said he forgot his umbrella, also.

- Commas set off terms such as “however” and “therefore”:

However, Hurricane Horace veered off course.
Hurricane Horace, however, veered off course.
Hurricane Horace veered off course, however.
Therefore, we avoided damages.

- A comma sets off a noun of direct address:

Rick, remember to bring your map.

- Appositives (the clause below that helps explain the noun preceding it are set off by commas:

Arlene Albertson, a native of Maine, liked the tropical region.

Quotation Marks. Quotation marks indicate the exact words of a speaker. Quote marks are employed in pairs.

“I’ll be glad when the wreckage is cleared,” the mayor said.

The mayor said, “I’ll be glad when the wreckage is cleared.”

If someone directly quotes another person, single quotes appear inside the set of direct quotes:

“My uncle told me, ‘Always keep your money in your shoe when you go to the big city,’” Nugent said. (Note the placement of the comma and period.)

Usually, other punctuation appears inside direct quotes. There are, however, exceptions to this rule. Here is an example:

Have you seen “War of the Worlds”?

In this example, “War of the Worlds” is the movie title as part of a question.

Question Marks. Question marks are used to end direct questions:

Do you think the stock market will continue to soar?

When part of a direct quote, question marks go inside the quotation marks:

Miller asked, “What time did the candidate concede the election?”

On a rare occasion, you might run across a quote with a question mark like this:

“Did you see ‘Who Framed Roger Rabbit?’?” Ebert asked.

Exclamation Marks. Used infrequently in news stories and almost never in news releases, exclamation marks close expressions of strong emotion or surprise:

“Wow! Jones set another record!” exclaimed the Atlanta announcer.

“Oh, what a night! The crowd cheered during the entire performance!” yelled Rashad.

Semicolons. This punctuation mark, more formal than a comma and less powerful than a period, is not used much in newspapers and never in broadcasting. If you see a semicolon between two independent clauses, you should consider using a period instead. Here is an example:

Before: By defeating Minnesota 4-3, Cleveland remained in first place;
the White Sox kept pace by beating the Yankees 8-3.

After: By defeating Minnesota 4-3, Cleveland remained in first place.
The White Sox kept pace by beating the Yankees 8-3.

Semicolons are handy in lists to provide clarity. In this paragraph, semicolons tell which modifier goes with which noun:

Receiving certificates of appreciation were Alvin Alvarado, senior, Ft. Wayne, Ind.; Josephine Baskin, sophomore, Robbins, Neb.; Oscar Cedenó, junior, San Marcos, Texas; Jacqui Cooper, senior, Waterproof, La.; and Derek Donaldson, senior, Mankato, Minn.

Colons. Colons can be used to alert readers to pay attention to what is coming. Readers can expect a list, an announcement or a quotation to read. Colons have additional uses as well. Here is an example of a colon introducing a series:

The safety officer advised motorists to have these items in a winter driver's kit: spare tire, blankets, flares, flashlight and kitty litter.

Colons also signal announcements such as this:

Attention, all voters: Voting hours for polling places in the Fourth District have been extended from 6 p.m. until 8 p.m. (Note that the complete sentence introduced by the colon begins with a capital letter.)

A general rule for introducing quotes by a colon is to use a colon if the quote is more than one sentence:

Dr. Acevedo's main points were: "Some immigrants have fought long and hard to gain an opportunity. Working within the system, we can bring about changes."

Dashes. Dashes are more dramatic than commas or colons. Writers add dashes to call attention or special emphasis to a group of words. Put a space on each side of a dash. If your keyboard does not have a dash key, use back-to-back hyphens.

Dashes may be used to set off a list of material in the middle of a sentence:

The middle of the Cubs' batting order — Johnson, Jones and Jefferson — failed to drive home any runs.

Use a dash after an introductory list or series:

Soldier, journalist, professor, chef and actor — Phillips tried all of these before he retreated to the hills of North Dakota to write a novel.

A dash is appropriate when there is a long pause or a dramatic turn in thought:

Downey was found asleep in bed — at his neighbor's house.

Parentheses and Brackets. Parentheses are used to set off nonessential information or words inserted to clarify. Brackets may be used to insert a clarifying word or phrase into a quotation. Brackets can be used to change an uppercase letter to lower case or to begin a sentence with a quotation that in its original form did not begin with a capital letter. Brackets around the word **[sic]** mark a mistake in spelling or grammar that occurred in the original quotation. A guideline for journalists is to use commas whenever possible and to keep the use of parentheses or brackets to a minimum.

One use for parentheses is in a caption to show who is where:

Sen. Jim Bunning (left) presents a retirement plaque to Alvin Walker, who worked 43 years for the federal government.

Another use for parentheses is to clarify:

“I’m sure it (the \$500,000 grant) will truly benefit our library,” Hopkins said.

Here’s an example of bracket use:

The detective wrote: “The suspect crossed the rod [sic] and puled [sic] the gun out of his pocket.”

Hyphens. Hyphens are used to make related modifiers compact:

She wore a blue-green blouse.
He chose the pin-striped suit.

Hyphens are used for clarity in some words, especially words with double letters:

re-elect
re-sign (signed again — used for clarity to avoid confusion with “resign”
as in “quit”)
pre-existing

Hyphens are used in scores, odds, voting totals, extended zip codes and fractions:

Final score was 123-88.
Odds were 7-4 in favor of the Bears.
The Senate voted 78-21 in favor of the bill.
Maldonado’s complete zip code is 22202-4508.
The construction project is about two-thirds complete, Scarpace estimated.

Apostrophes. The two main uses for the apostrophe are to show possession and to form contractions:

Fulbright's new car cost more than Jones' house.
Fred and Wilma's taxi service is slow. (joint owners)
Steve's and Miles' cars need washing. (separate owners)
"I don't think I'll listen to rock 'n' roll tonight," Huey said.

Slashes. Uses for slashes in journalistic writing are limited. Veteran editors advise avoiding writing his or her like this: his/her. The use of an "or" is preferred in such word pairs.

One acceptable use for slashes is to form a fraction:

1/5 3 1/3

Slashes are used in World Wide Web Uniform Resource Locators (URLs) such as <http://www.google.com>.

Another use is to show line breaks in poetry or songs:

A cricket's on your window pane./ Should I let him in?/ I'm here in your house
alone./ It's mid-November./ And frost will come soon./ Where would he go if
not here?

READABILITY FORMULAS

STUDY PREVIEW: *Copy editors can use readability formulas to let writers know if they are following basic writing principles, such as using short, simple, familiar words and varying sentence length and construction.*

Flesch Formula

Many copy editors and reporters use newsroom computer programs to calculate sentence length, number of passive sentences and readability level. Such calculations are based upon the work of Rudolf Flesch and other readability experts who began research in the 1940s. Based on some studies Flesch conducted of its writing, the Associated Press recommended average sentence lengths of 19 to 20 words. Flesch found the ideal number of syllables to be 150 per 100 words.

The Flesch formula gives a 100-word passage a readability score based on the number of words per sentence and syllables per word. Here are the steps for Flesch's formula:

1. Select a passage of 100 words.
2. Measure the average sentence length and number of syllables.
3. Multiply the number of sentences by 1.015.
4. Multiply the number of syllables by 0.846.
5. Add these two numbers and subtract them from 206.835.
6. Find the result on Flesch's scale:

0-15: Very difficult, suitable for college graduates.

15-50: Difficult, college level.

50-60: Fairly difficult, for high school students.

60-70: Standard, for eighth and ninth grade students.

70-80: Fairly easy, for seventh graders.

80-90: Easy, for sixth graders.

90-100: Very easy, for fifth graders.

For example, if the Flesch reading ease score for a news story is 49.5, then it would be on the college level. Most news people aim for 60-70.

Gunning Fog Index

Another readability scholar, Robert Gunning, created a formula for United Press International to see how many years of school readers need to understand UPI stories. Gunning's formula, called a Fog Index, is somewhat simpler than Flesch's:

1. Select a passage of 100 words.
2. Count the number of sentences in the passage. If the 100-word limit cuts a sentence off before it is finished, count the sentence if more than half of it is contained in the 100 words.
3. Calculate the average number of words in a sentence by dividing the number of sentences into 100.
4. Count the number of words with three or more syllables. Do not include names, easy compound words or verbs with three syllables because they end in a suffix such as -ing, -es or -ed. Calculate the percentage of words with three or more syllables in the same passage.
5. Add the two figures (average number of words per sentence and percent of words with three or more syllables).
6. Multiply the total by 0.4 to determine the number of years of school readers would need to comprehend the passage.

Box 2.4

Readability Reminders

Flesch, Gunning, other readability experts and copy editors agree on these writing and editing tips that help writers score well on readability formulas and with their audience:

- Use familiar words in context.
- Find a human interest angle.
- Write short sentences on the average.
- Vary sentence length and structure.
- Choose action verbs.
- Employ conversational writing.
- Create simple sentences.
- Maintain audience's attention.

A score of 9 would be ninth-grade level; 13 would be college freshman level.

Such formulas help reporters and copy editors check whether they are reaching the reading levels of their audiences. They need to keep in mind that not every short word is necessarily easy and that each long word is not always difficult. It's true, for example, that people will look at difficult stories written on a high level if their interest level is high.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Copy editors deal with spelling, punctuation and structure to provide the best possible product for their audiences.

By avoiding misspelled words, copy editors can maintain credibility and prevent embarrassment. Although most computers have spelling checks, editors should consult a dictionary or stylebook when in doubt. By following some spelling tips, such as “i” before “e,” copy editors can improve their spelling and catch others' errors.

Copy editors apply their knowledge of grammar and proper language use to improve stories.

Relying on experience and a style guide, copy editors select correct punctuation, ranging from commas to dashes.

They can use readability formulas to determine if the stories they edit are at a suitable reading level for their audience. Readability studies point to shorter words and sentences and stories written in a familiar context.

For Further Reading

David Bowman, "Keeping it Simple: the Subject-verb-object Structure,"

<<http://www.articlesbase.com/authors/david-bowman/31046.htm>>.

"Readability Index Calculator,"

<<http://www.standards-schmandards.com/exhibits/rix/index.php>>.

"Sentence Fragments,"

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_frag.html>.

"Ten Tips for Better Spelling,"

<<http://www.factmonster.com/ipka/A0903395.html>>.

Chapter 3 Learning Goals

- *Grammar and proper usage are effective tools for copy editors.*
- *Copy editors need solid working knowledge of language and style so they can be sure stories are understandable, current, concise, precise, complete, correct and consistent.*
- *Copy editors value straightforward words and avoid vague wording, euphemisms, clutter, clichés and redundancies. They translate jargon and specialized terms and follow style guidelines.*
- *Copy editors need knowledge of math and double-check numbers to prevent errors.*
- *Writers and editors work with all parts of speech to communicate effectively while painting word pictures.*



Chapter 3

WORKING WITH WORDS

Being Tight, Right, Concise and Precise

When E. B. White was a student at Cornell University at the end of World War I, he took a course known as English 8 under William Strunk Jr. The text was a “little book” written and privately printed by the professor.

In 43 pages, Strunk summed up a case for accuracy, brevity and cleanliness in using the language. In class, the professor repeated his rules to reinforce his points, with advice as simple as “Do not break sentences in two.”

After Strunk died in 1946, Macmillan Publishing Co. asked White to revise the book for a new generation of students. White, by then an accomplished author, was pleased to do so, carrying on Strunk’s crusade to cut the vast tangle of English rhetoric down to size and write its rules and principles “on the head of a pin.”

“Seven rules of usage, 11 principles of composition, a few matters of form, and a list of words and expressions commonly misused — that was the sum and substance of Professor Strunk’s work,” wrote White. The book, *The Elements of Style*, is still in print, helping countless writers tell their stories concisely and precisely. E. B. White wrote various works, including “Charlotte’s Web,” but he is just as famous for *The Elements of Style*.

The authors’ advice remains as valid as ever in today’s newsrooms. For example, Strunk and White did not object to accepting new words, but they stood by the principle:



E. B. White

Prefer the standard to the offbeat. Wrote White, “A new word is always up for survival. Many do survive. Others grow stale and disappear. Most, at least in their infancy, are more appropriate to conversation than to composition.”

White died in 1985 at age 86. However, much of White and his professor live on in their little book.

This chapter picks up that lesson, helping to decide which words are necessary and how to separate them from the unnecessary ones.

GRAMMAR AND USAGE

STUDY PREVIEW: *Grammar and proper usage are effective tools for copy editors.*

Grammar, which has been discussed since Shakespeare’s day, is the study of the form and structure of words and their arrangement. Sometimes it is called usage. In the 18th century, English grammarians began to write books about language, and those rules have expanded as the language has evolved.

Grammar: the study of the form and structure of words and their arrangement

Because grammar and usage constantly change, language-conscious people disagree on some fine points. News people take a middle ground to coincide as much as possible with the majority of their mass audiences. Most newsroom stylebooks specify a particular grammar book as the reference on usage issues, and stylebooks deal with the most common questions.

Editors occasionally use grammar-check software on their newsroom computers, but language is not a subject that lends itself to binary analysis. Although spell checkers are quite useful, most grammar-check programs are virtually useless. Writing is an art, not a science, and no one has found a substitute for a good eye and ear — and a good mind — to know what’s most effective for a particular audience.

IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE SKILLS

STUDY PREVIEW: *Copy editors use a solid working knowledge of language and style so that they can be sure stories are understandable, current, concise, precise, complete, correct and consistent.*

Knowledge of Language

If you are reading this book, you probably plan to practice in some area of mass communication — advertising, broadcasting, journalism, public relations or visual communication. You might have plans for placing messages on a Web site or writing technical manuals. All such mass media work requires an effective command of the language, but none as much as news editing.

Whenever editors, print or broadcast, are asked about interns and other new people in the newsroom, the pros reply: They need to know grammar, spelling and punctuation. They need to write properly.

A love of the language and knowledge of proper usage are excellent starting points. Experienced editors advise beginners to start early studying the language. After all, the work of editors is primarily words.

Applying Language Skills

Drop in to visit a newsroom, and here are some one-liners you will hear.

- “Great catch — the best one this week!” So, what’s a “great catch”? A copy editor has found that a columnist had referred to a deceased former mayor as still being alive.
- “Hey, I like that head!” A well-written headline draws applause from fellow editors, especially with good play on words. The headline, which was about a judge ruling that a car dealer could continue flying 12 large flags at his dealership, was: Star-spangled banners are yet to wave.
- “See if you can put a new spin on this one.” “Spin”? That occurs when an editor asks for a fresher angle on a story that already has been told and needs a new angle. In this case, a boulder had rolled into a person’s house, and the supervising editor wanted to know what else had happened.

Copy editors revel in their language skills, like tackling the following bloated sentence a reporter turns in:

The mayor of this city said that as the incumbent officeholder she at the present moment in time could not comment on the improvement of the infrastructure resurfacing situation in the northern sector.

It could be cleaned up like this:

The mayor had no comment on paving roads on the North Side.

WORD CHOICES

STUDY PREVIEW: *Copy editors value straightforward words and avoid vague words, euphemisms, clutter, clichés and redundancies. They translate jargon and specialized terms and follow style guidelines.*

Straightforward Words

The military is notorious for stodgy, convoluted writing, even though an officer who cannot write battle plans accurately, briefly, clearly and completely can foil the mission. That's why Army Regulation 25-50 stresses that effective writing needs to be a clear message understood in a single, rapid reading and free of errors in grammar, mechanics and usage. Winning the battle can depend on whether messages are concise, organized and to the point. This also is true in the newsroom.

Taking a straightforward approach with words means using simple, familiar words in short sentences and paragraphs. Being straightforward means writing with concrete, specific words, including vivid verbs. Cutting words can create space for more stories.

Vague and Empty Words

Have you ever read something and then asked yourself, "Huh?" Or have you read a news story and wondered how far "a few miles away" is? What about when a politician claims his opponent is lying but doesn't say what about?

These are examples of vagueness that a copy editor let slip by.

Empty phrases such as "needless to say," "irregardless" (which is not a proper word — "regardless" is) and "in a sense" continue to be used, although not needed. Some vague words that cause more vagueness include "situation," "activity," "facility" and "issue." Vague terms that can be interpreted differently include "average," "few," "many," "several," "medium," "large," "poverty-level," "well known" and "middle-aged." If Jones "works with" a group, what does she do?

Good news writing is specific. If Archie is 47 and his wife Edith is 43, state their ages. "Middle-aged" is not specific. Terms such as "best" and "greatest" need to be replaced by specific information with a reference to a source to show the basis. If a sportswriter writes that a player is the best active defensive professional basketball player, he needs to explain why the player qualifies for such an honor. For example, the player might have led the league in steals or blocked shots for four of the past five seasons.

Euphemisms

Euphemisms, words meant to sound more pleasant than plain words, creep into many death stories — like “passed away,” “succumbed” or “went to receive his reward.” Use the simple word “died.” Leave the euphemisms for the paid funeral announcements.

Euphemisms: words meant to sound more pleasant or important than plain words

It’s euphemistic to call a slum a “depressed socioeconomic area” and to refer to a company layoff as “downsizing.” Garbage men have gone from “sanitation workers” to “waste-disposal personnel,” but they still do the same job. Janitors became “custodians” and then “maintenance engineers.” There are numerous “human resources” offices. Whatever happened to “personnel”? Gambling often is referred to as “gaming.”

Copy editors decide whether to use the fancy or the plain words. Wordsmith William Zinsser advised: Don’t hang on to something useless just because you think it’s beautiful. He wrote: “Simplify, simplify.”

Clutter

Word clutter occurs when reporters use too many words. “At the present time” means the same as “now.” Is “currently” needed when the person is doing that now? If the budget is “currently \$4 billion,” then it is \$4 billion. “Each” and “every” mean the same, so eliminate one.

Word clutter wastes the audience’s space and time and hardly piques interest. For the sake of the audience, copy editors apply conciseness and preciseness by seeking brief and exact language. See Box 3.1 on the next page for a list of “clutter words.”

Clichés

A copy editor might be as pretty as a picture, sharp as a tack and the salt of the earth. She could have her nose to the grindstone, shoulder to the wheel, and ear to the ground. If a shot rang out behind closed doors, she might remain cool as a cucumber, dig in her heels and move by leaps and bounds faster than a speeding bullet toward the scene of the crime to take the bull by the horns and let sleeping dogs lie. Talk about clichés! Copy editors replace worn-out phrases with fresh, straightforward words (see Box 3.2).

Box 3.1

Clutter Words

Copy editors can save time and space by eliminating clutter words. Compare these clutter words to their slimmer versions:

Original	Compressed version
A large number of	Many
a.m. and morning	Use either a.m. or morning
As of now	Now (or omit)
At the present moment/time	Now (or omit)
Bald-headed	Bald
Began to converse	Talked
Blue/White-colored car	Blue/White car
Completely destroyed	Destroyed
Cost the sum of	Cost
Current temperature	Temperature
Currently	Now (or omit)
Descended down	Descended
Distance of	Omit and use the measurement
Each and every	Use each or every, not both
Early hours	Early
Eliminate altogether	Eliminate
Follow after	Follow
Have got	Have
Jewish rabbi	Rabbi
Join together	Join
Merge together	Merge
Needless to say	Omit
New innovations	Innovations
New renovations	Renovations
Off of	Off
On account of	Because
Once in a while	Rarely
Old cliché	Cliché
p.m. and night	Use either p.m. or night
Qualified expert	Expert
True facts	Facts or truth
Receded back	Receded
Return back	Return
Was quoted as saying	Said

Box 3.2 Clichés

Avoid clichés like the plague. Some tired, overused expressions include:

all work and no play	kill two birds with one stone
birds of a feather flock together	kindred spirits
blanket of snow	labor of love
blind as a bat	last gasp
call a spade a spade	mark my words
calls all the shots	nip it in the bud
cautious optimism	nose to the grindstone
cool as a cucumber	pretty as a picture
drunk as a skunk	read the riot act
dynamic duo	silence is golden
faster than a speeding bullet	slip through your fingers
fine-toothed comb	take the bull by the horns
goose is cooked	up a creek without a paddle
hard as a rock	vanish into thin air
hot as a firecracker	welcome with open arms
hungry as a wolf	what goes around comes around
ignorance is bliss	wolves in sheep's clothing
in a New York minute	X marks the spot
kettle of fish	winter wonderland

Redundancies

The cliché about two heads are better than one might be true sometimes, but two words are not always better than one, especially if they are redundant, or as one copy editor put it, “wretched redundancies.”

Some of those redundancies are: “unverified rumor,” “true facts,” “past history,” “new record,” “reflect back,” “continue on,” “quoted as saying,” “reduced down,” “retreated back,” and “12 o’clock noon.” Copy editors concerned with word economy head off such expressions. However, in some stories repetition can be strong and purposeful, bringing rhythm to the language and emphasizing key information. Know when redundancy weighs down your writing and when it serves your purposes.

Jargon and Specialized Terms

Most professions have their own working language, and some of the expressions, called jargon, are more difficult to translate than foreign languages.

A lawyer might refer to a “change of venue,” but the audience might not understand that the lawyer is talking about making a motion to change the location of a trial. A police officer might say that “the alleged perpetrator was apprehended and now is in custody,” meaning they caught the suspect. The football coach might say he plans to use a “nickel defense,” and many non-football fans would not know what it means. The stockbroker might allude to a “no-load mutual fund,” leaving some readers clueless.

Reporters covering beats such as business or sports might tend to put too much jargon in their stories, causing confusion for some readers or listeners. It happens in public relations, when writers might be experts on their subject but could be out of touch with the general audience. If people cannot understand the text, they probably will quit reading or listening.

Rapidly expanding technology creates its own specialized terms. Copy editors keep a list as a reminder that the words have not reached the common usage stage.

Some foreign language terms can be obscure, too. Either define them or place them in context. If deadlines permit, editors can check with reporters for a translation. If the reporter is unavailable, copy editors can consult with the source of the expression. Another approach appeared on a bumper sticker: “When you absolutely, positively have to know, ask a librarian.”

Most publications limit slang to colorful quotes, if the quotes help reveal the character of the speaker or add flavor to the story. E. B. White would advise to delay putting words into print until they are generally acceptable in stylebooks or dictionaries.

Expletives

Copy editors change sentences beginning with “there is” or “it is.” “It” and “there” are expletives, words filling the place of another word, phrase or clause. Usually they are unnecessary and create wordy sentences.

Expletives: words filling the place of another word, phrase or clause

Example: There were many young men volunteering to carry Brandy’s bags.

Changed: Many young men volunteered to carry Brandy’s bags.

Local Stylebooks

Newspaper staffs often create their own local style guides to supplement the Associated Press Stylebook or to cover a special event. For example, the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* published a stylebook featuring a guide to the 1996 Olympics. One entry in the Olympic sports section was: football — do not use the term football to refer to the sport of soccer. The non-Olympic part of the guide contained y'all, “a Southernism, a contraction for ‘you all’ (commonly misspelled ya’ll).” The word, which seems to be plural, has found some acceptance in Atlanta, according to the guide.

Typical of many newspaper staff manuals, Atlanta’s guide was based on the Associated Press Stylebook and Webster’s New World Dictionary. The guide contained entries of local, state and regional interest not covered by the AP or the dictionary. It also contained exceptions to the AP and dictionary.

Copy editors’ reference tools include the AP stylebook, a dictionary and their local stylebook. At some newspapers, the stylebook is computerized. Other references copy editors like to have nearby are books of synonyms, a thesaurus, an atlas, area maps and a book of quotations. If the publication’s library or other databases are available online, copy editors can access that information.

FIGURING OUT NUMBERS

STUDY PREVIEW: *Copy editors double-check numbers to prevent errors and to avoid embarrassment. Knowing how to present numbers in an understandable manner is a useful talent.*

Catching Errors/Double-Checking

Although most editors score lower in math than on vocabulary tests, they need to know if things add up — correctly.

By nosing into numbers, copy editors catch errors before they reach the public. A copy editor might see that numbers in a chart do not add up to 100 percent. Either the numbers should add up or there should be an explanation why not.

Copy editors can double-check for consistency in style and math. If a death notice states a person was born in June 1927 and died in March 2008, then the deceased was 80, not 81 as one might gather on a quick glance. Death notices and paid obituaries should agree on such facts, and the age in the headline should be consistent with the story.

Copy editors can confirm whether a person was alive or old enough to do certain actions on specific dates. Could a 90-year-old man be a veteran of World War I, which ended in 1918?

By checking numbers, a copy editor can prevent potentially embarrassing moments. If a woman, 23, is listed as having children 17, 5 and 3 years old, something does not seem to add up. After checking with the reporter, the copy editor found that the woman had children 5 and 3 years old, plus a 17-month-old daughter. That seems plausible. Another remote possibility is the woman had children aged 5 and 3 and a 17-year-old stepchild.

Glancing through page proofs, a copy editor found that numbers did not add up in the baseball standings. Someone had dropped the wins, losses and percentages down one team, leaving blanks for the top team. A quick eye saved complaints from grumbling fans, since the local team was leading the division.

Stylebooks and Numbers

Just as they translate jargon and foreign terms, copy editors interpret numbers for their audiences. Copy editors can find guidance on number usage in stylebooks or in localized style guides. One goal in dealing with numbers is to be compact. Basically, numbers from one through nine are spelled out, and 10 and above are written in figures. Ages are expressed in digits, such as: Jerome, 13, and 5-month-old Althena.

An exception is when a number begins a sentence. Spell out shorter numbers, such as six or eleven, but try to redraft sentences to avoid clumsy large numbers at the start. Here are some examples:

Twelve students received scholarships.

The hurricane left an estimated 150,000 customers without electricity.

More than 6,500 people were evacuated from the path of the flooded Mississippi River (NOT: Six thousand, five hundred persons were evacuated).

Numbers sections of stylebooks cover addresses, ages, casual uses, centuries, dimensions, fractions, legislative districts, millions, ordinals, proper names, Roman numerals, serial numbers, scores, series, space craft, temperatures, time, votes, weights and years.

Percentages

For some people, percentages are tricky — but copy editors figure out the correct numbers. Percentages are determined by dividing a portion of the number by the total (i.e. 10 out of 21), then moving the decimal point two spaces to the right. If a basketball player hit 10 of 21 field goal attempts, the percentage would be 10 divided by 21 or .476, which is 47.6 percent. Survey results are expressed in percentages, and most surveys provide a margin of error journalists should interpret in the story. If a poll shows 47 percent of the respondents favor an issue and 53 percent oppose it, and if the margin of error is 5 percent, results are too close to call. In this case, the range of people favoring the issue could be between 42 and 52 percent, and those opposed could range from 48 to 58 percent.

Percentage: the ratio of two numbers converted to a base of 100

Some stories deal with the percentage of increase or decrease. For example, if a worker's wage increased from \$8.15 an hour to \$9, the increase would be more than 10 percent. To get the percentage, you first subtract the original amount (8.15) from the new amount (9) to get the difference (.85). Then, divide the original amount (8.15) into the difference (.85) to determine the percent of increase (.1042 or 10.4 percent).

If football attendance this year is 6,000 per game, compared to 8,000 per game last season, then you find the percentage of decrease is 25 percent. You find that by subtracting 6,000 from 8,000 to get 2,000. Divide 2,000 by 8,000 to determine a decrease of 25 percent.

Explaining Numbers

Not all problems are as simple as percentages. Some business writers must explain the national debt, the stock market, the relationships between stocks and bonds and interest rates. Copy editors who work with business sections learn to interpret numbers, such as interest rates, lines of credit, bankruptcy, stock prices and inflation.

Copy editors can be helpful to their audience if they ensure that stories dealing with tax increases and school bond issues are told as clearly as possible, explaining how increases will affect the public. For example, a homeowner could understand if told a school tax increase would mean tax on her \$153,000 home would go up \$300 a year. Readers want to know how stories affect them, and copy editors can interpret for them.

NOUNS AND PRONOUNS

STUDY PREVIEW: *Nouns are the names of persons, places and things, and pronouns substitute for nouns. Copy editors have learned to be selective when dealing with pronouns.*

Nouns

Nouns are the names of persons, places, things, concepts or qualities:

Person: Alexa
Place: Arkansas
Thing: rain
Concept: religion
Quality: truth

Noun: name of a person, place or thing

“Alexa” and “Arkansas” are proper nouns (specific names of a person and a place, respectively), so they are capitalized.

Other nouns, called common nouns, are not capitalized. Traditional, formal usage follows an *upstyle* format that includes capitalizing words that fall in the area between proper and common. Almost all newsrooms’ styles, including AP, follow a *downstyle*. Because downstyles use fewer capital letters, which are larger than lowercase letters, downstyle consumes less space and, theoretically, makes room for more stories in a given amount of space. Some broadcasting copy is written in all capitals, but some broadcasters prefer downstyle. Studies have shown that capital letters take the eye and mind a while longer to recognize and process.

FORMAL: Ian Hua, Director of the Club, died Sunday.
AP: Ian Hua, director of the club, died Sunday.

Nouns have many uses in language, as nouns and verbs form the meat of all sentences.

Pronouns

Pronouns take the place of nouns, and generally they present no problems. “He” is the obvious surrogate for a man, “she” for a woman. Some pronouns are gender-free: “everybody,” “it,” “someone” and “they.”

Pronoun: word that substitutes for a noun

Personal Pronouns. Editors need to be alert to writers who forget that some pronouns are impersonal and some personal. It's indefensibly dehumanizing to use "that" or "which" in referring to a person.

WRONG: The student that applied for the internship was accepted.

RIGHT: The student who applied for the internship was accepted.

Gender Issues. In its current state of evolution, the English language hasn't devised a gender-free singular pronoun, which creates problems in telling news.

Are all nurses female? The reporter who wrote this sentence seems to say so:

A nursing student will take clinical studies when she is a senior.

Just as bad is the presumption that all criminals are men, as in this example:

The only clue the burglar left was his green bandanna, which was caught on an exposed nail in the rafters.

Editors who spot these errors have numerous remedies available. One is going with the gender-free plural "they" or "their":

Nursing students will go into their clinical studies as seniors, according to the university catalog.

Another solution is avoiding pronouns entirely:

The only clue the burglar left was a green bandanna, which was caught on an exposed nail in the rafters.

Demonstrative Pronouns. Guard against demonstrative pronouns: "this," "that," "these," and "those." If the antecedent is a whole previous paragraph, you may be asking too much of quick readers and inattentive listeners to refer back — especially if the antecedent is conceptual.

Demonstrative Pronouns: words that point to specific nouns: this, that, these, those

Weak: Rogers proposed expanding the cafeteria to include a deli-like snack bar, a cozy pasta nook and a soda fountain. "This will cost \$423,000," he said. (Does "this" refer to the soda fountain? To everything? A hurried reading may leave some people either unsure or thinking they are sure but being wrong.)

Better: Rogers proposed expanding the cafeteria to include a deli-like snack bar, a cozy pasta nook and a soda fountain. “The whole project will cost \$423,000,” he said.

Possible Problems with Pronouns. A quartet of relative pronouns — “who,” “whom,” “which” and “that” — cause confusion to reporters and copy editors. By applying a few simple guidelines, you can keep them straight.

Who or Whom? Some grammarians say “whom” is archaic and we should get rid of it, but for most newsrooms those grammarians are ahead of their time. Copy editors still distinguish “who” from “whom.” The experts will tell you that “who” and “whoever” are nominative case and that “whom” and “whomever” are objective case, and then go on to explain some fine points of usage. Here’s an easier way to sort it out:

1. Read the sentence out loud immediately after the point at which you need to insert “who.”
2. Then try “he.” If it sounds right, use “who.”
3. If not, then try “him.” If it sounds right, use “whom.”
4. If not, try “she” and “her.” “She” will mean “who,” and “her” will mean “whom.”
5. For a plural, try “they” and “them.” “They” means “who” is right, and “them” means “whom” is right.

Thus, “whoever,” not “whomever,” is correct in the following sentences:

Whoever wins the election will inherit the problem.

Jim promised to give the envelope to *whoever* came first.

Sometimes you need to reshuffle the sentence to sort it out, as with this sentence:

“To whom did she ask the question?” the lawyer asked.

Your options:

- She did ask the question to he. (Nope)
- She did ask the question to she. (Nope)
- She did ask the question to they. (Nope)
- She did ask the question to him. (Yes)
- She did ask the question to her. (Yes)
- She did ask the question to them. (Yes)

So “whom” is correct.

Who. “Who” is a relative pronoun in the nominative case, meaning it takes the place of a noun or other pronoun. It can be a subject, the complement of a linking verb or an appositive. When “who” is used close to the noun it modifies, it is easier to identify and choose over “whom,” as in:

Relative Pronouns:
words that introduce subordinate clauses serving as adjectives

Incorrect: The mechanic, whom owned her own business, did not want to relocate.

Correct: The mechanic, who owned her own business, did not want to relocate.

Sometimes the subject “who” gets separated from its clause, so writers and editors might incorrectly choose the objective case:

Incorrect: The teacher whom the superintendent said was incompetent was asked to resign in May.

Correct: The teacher who the superintendent said was incompetent was asked to resign in May.

In the above sentence, “who was incompetent” is a subordinate clause modifying teacher. “Whom” is not the object of “the superintendent said.” Sometimes it helps to turn questions around or to take sentences apart:

“Who” did she say scored highest on the test? (Who scored highest?)

Incorrect: “Whom” did the television reporter say won the Senate race?

Correct: “Who” did the television reporter say won the Senate race?
(Who won the Senate race?)

A general rule is to select “who” over “that” or “which” whenever people are referred to in a story.

Whom. “Whom” is not used much in spoken language, and some experts have suggested eliminating the word from writing. However, until it officially disappears, we must deal with it. One tip in choosing between the two is to try substituting “he” or “him,” “she” or “her” for who or whom to see which sounds better.

“Whom” is used in objective cases:

“Whom” did the commandant select to attend the conference? (direct object — the commandant did select him)

She is the woman “whom” the police arrested for embezzlement. (direct object — the police arrested her)

To “whom” did you give the message? (object of preposition)

Which and That. Two of the most confusing words in the English language are “which” and “that.” Generally, clauses introduced by “which” are set off by commas. The information in those clauses is not essential to the sentence’s meaning. The information included in the clauses beginning with “which” can be omitted, while essential clauses must stay.

In contrast, “that” introduces clauses that are needed to convey the meaning of the sentence. Here is an example of a nonessential clause:

The sailboat, which has not left the dock all summer, belongs to my aunt.

Example of an essential clause:

The train that runs through West Monroe hauls a lot of plywood.

VERBS, ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

STUDY PREVIEW: Writers and editors work with verbs and nouns to form sentences and add adjectives and adverbs as modifiers to complete word pictures.

Verbs

Verbs show action or being. These are among thousands of action verbs in the language: throw, drive, zoom. These are verbs that show state of being: are, was, is, seem.

Verbs: words that show action or being

Action Verbs. Editors can make dull, flat copy sizzle and dance by fitting in the right action verbs.

Being Verbs. Nobody likes state of being verbs much because they add so little. Who, for example, can get excited about the word “was”? Some editors try to purge as many being verbs from copy as they can, making stronger sentences in the process:

Flat: The stagecoach was late.

Livelier: The stagecoach arrived late.

Better: The stagecoach rolled in late.

Tense. Verbs have tense, which puts action in past, present or future time frames. Most news is about past events — things that have occurred — so past tense is the natural way to tell most stories. Usually it is best to change tense only when you need to alert your audience that the time frame is changing. Otherwise, tense switches jerk the audience around needlessly, and you run the risk of confusion.

Adjectives

Adjectives modify or describe nouns or their substitutes, adding detail: dark cloud, hazy day, overcast sky, punctual student. Some adjectives set boundaries: 12 trees, 640 acres, 184 passengers.

Adjectives: words used to modify or describe nouns or pronouns

Purists say that while adjectives narrow the meaning of a noun, they can never contradict a noun. These editors get alarmed at phrases like “alleged burglar.” Literally, they say, the phrase means the person is a burglar and “alleged” tells only what kind of burglar the person is — the burglar is alleged to be a burglar.

This is not hair-splitting, as police reporters and editors who handle their copy know. Rather than prematurely state somebody has done wrong by calling the person an “accused murderer,” it’s better to find alternatives that attribute the accusation to a credible source, instead of having the writer be the judge and jury:

The prosecutor accused Joynter of murder.
Joynter was charged with murder.

Adverbs

Adverbs are words used to modify or qualify a verb, adjective or another adverb. Some writers misuse adverbs like “very” and “really,” mistakenly believing these words increase the intensity of their writing. All these words do is clutter, and copy editors call them false intensifiers. Almost all adverb intensifiers can be stricken without damaging a sentence’s meaning:

Adverb: word used to modify or qualify a verb, verbal, adjective or another adverb

False Intensifier: adverb intended to increase intensity but only clutters

The ~~very~~ handsome man boarded the airplane.
He dropped an ~~extremely~~ expensive necklace in the drain.
The library was ~~completely~~ quiet.
Skidmore’s homer was ~~positively~~ beautiful.

This is not to say these words can always be sacrificed, because in rare situations they work well. Use this rule: Anytime you encounter one of the words above — or “so” or “truly” — check whether dropping the words changes the meaning. If it can be dropped, then it’s a false intensifier.

Redundant Intensifiers. Words like “unique” and “perfect” can’t take modifiers. Can something be “most perfect”? Or “more unique”? Of course not. “Perfect” and “unique” mean beyond comparison.

Hyphens and Adverbs. “-ly” words never take hyphens to combine them into hypothetical modifiers.

CONJUNCTIONS, PREPOSITIONS AND INTERJECTIONS

STUDY PREVIEW: *Conjunctions and prepositions are vital in the construction of effective writing. Used rarely in news reports, interjections show emotion or surprise.*

Conjunctions

Conjunctions serve as connectors between words, phrases, clauses, and sentences.

Coordinating Conjunctions. The word “and” is the most frequent coordinating conjunction and also the most frequently misused. Be sure the elements connected by an “and” have the same value and are related.

Conjunction: a word that joins words, phrases, or clauses, showing relationships between the elements

Right: The quarterback spotted a receiver and quickly released the football.

Wrong: Norma lost \$100 at the casino, and she is now walking toward the grocery store.

Also look for parallel construction in the elements that “and” connects. The quarterback example above is constructed in a parallel manner. The sentence about Norma is not.

Contrasting Conjunctions. The most common contrasting conjunction is “but.” Others include “although,” “even so,” “however,” “though,” and “while.” These conjunctions help contrast elements in a sentence.

Note how the following sentences could be combined by changing the period to a comma, and making the “but” lowercase.

Hoover played the slot machines in Las Vegas. But he did not win.
Hoover played the slot machines in Las Vegas, but he did not win.

Conjunctions and Commas. To avoid run-on sentences, use a comma when a conjunction connects two short sentences:

Run-on: Karl caught the ball Sven dropped it.
Correct: Karl caught the ball, but Sven dropped it.

Some people reflexively put a comma before every “but.” That’s wrong if a “but” links only words or phrases.

Jackard was tall but a poor basketball player.

Many grammarians today, including those in newsrooms, have dropped the serial comma (also called the Harvard comma), the one that used to precede “and” in a series:

Old style: Tarleton returned tired, ragged, and smelly.
New style: Tarleton returned tired, ragged and smelly.

An exception to the new style is when a comma helps clarity:

Muddled: Uncle Horace willed his niece all his property, houses and a boat dock. (Did the uncle will his property and houses and boat dock, or was his property houses and a boat dock? If he willed property and houses and a boat dock, a comma is needed to avoid confusion.)
Clear: Uncle Horace willed his niece all his property, including houses and a boat dock.

The contrasting conjunction “however” generally is most effective inside a sentence.

Intro: However, the recipe overdid salt.
Extro: The recipe overdid salt, however.
Mid-sentence: The recipe, however, overdid salt.

As a conjunction, “however” always is set off by commas.

Capitalizing Conjunctions. If a cranky English teacher told you never to begin a sentence with “and” or “but,” now’s your chance to strike back. News people have recognized the extra impact an introductory conjunction can give a sentence:

Tepid contrast: Tim went with the group to Mexico, but he became ill on the third day.

Firmer contrast: Tim went with the group to Mexico. But he became ill on the third day.

Prepositions

For people who begin learning English in the cradle, the right prepositions come naturally. When English is a second language, however, prepositions are difficult. What are prepositions? They are the words that show the relationship between a noun or noun substitute and another word or words:

Prepositions: words that show relationships between a noun or noun substitute and another word or words

The horse struggled in the mud.

Voters placed California squarely against tobacco.

Marcy found herself with only a dollar.

Preposition Flab. While prepositions are essential in the language, some reporters overdo them. Note how these excess prepositions and their related words can be trimmed to make livelier sentences:

Before: Senators voted at the meeting to slash fees.

After: Senators voted to slash fees.

Before: Martin fell down from the balcony.

After: Martin fell from the balcony.

Before: They swapped cars at the corner of First and Oak.

After: They swapped cars at First and Oak.

When a prepositional phrase appears at the end of a sentence, ask whether it can be cut without damaging the sentence’s meaning:

Before: President Bush took his oath of office on the steps of the Capitol.
After: President Bush took his oath.

Singsong Prepositional Phrases. Too many prepositional phrases in a row make for a singsong rhythm that lulls, rather than excites, the audience. Because news is not intended to put people to sleep, editors trim excess prepositions and related words.

Before: The dog scampered out the door, through the yard, over the fence, down the alley, across the bridge, into the street and toward the schoolyard.
After: The dog scampered out the door, heading toward the schoolyard.

Interjections

Like the comic books, the old ABC “Batman” television show, still a cult favorite, reveled in interjections like Pow! Splat! and Blam! What would the sensational tabloids do without interjections with the exclamation point that invariably follows them?

Interjections: words that express surprise or emotion

Generally, journalists don’t use these words much. One journalism professor, perhaps with a disdain for comic books or the *National Enquirer*, told students they could use an interjection only once in their lifetime. “Don’t rush,” he said, “or you may later regret you used your one chance on something not as worthy as what will come later.”

What’s an interjection? These words express surprise or emotion. Inevitably, they are punctuated with an exclamation mark. They seldom show up beyond tabloid headlines except in quotations — and then rarely.

“Wow!” she said, gazing up in awe. “What a wave!”
“Ah!” Lance said with relief. “Now we can relax.”
“Hey!” the driver shouted. “Don’t scratch my car!”

VERBALS

STUDY PREVIEW: *Verbals* — gerunds, participles and infinitives — add a feel of action to sentences as they perform as nouns, adjectives or adverbs.

Gerunds

Gerunds serve as nouns and always take an “-ing” ending. Gerunds appear in the present participle form of verbs, so they sometimes are confused with participles. Some examples of gerunds are: swimming, bowling and walking.

Gerunds: verbals ending in “-ing” and serving as nouns

Swimming is good exercise for your body, and editing can be good exercise for your mind.

Participles

Participles, which can end in “-ing” or “-ed” in participle phrases, are used as adjectives, usually modifying nouns or pronouns. Some examples:

Running with the torch in her hand, Astrid smiled to the spectators. (Here “running” is the present participle in a phrase modifying Astrid.)

Participles: verbals that can end in “-ing” or “-ed” and are used as adjectives, usually modifying nouns or pronouns

Knocked off his feet by the huge wave, Alfred yelled for help. (“Knocked” is the past participle of “knock” in a phrase modifying Alfred.)

Participles can be strong modifiers, but they can cause embarrassment if they are misplaced or left dangling. Such modifiers can seem to modify nothing, but they often modify the wrong thing:

Entering the immense arena, the stage seemed so far away. (Did the stage enter the arena or did some person who was left out of the sentence?)

While riding in the Mardi Gras parade, her eye was caught by two drunks fighting in an alley. (Was she with her eye? Did the drunks literally catch the eye?)

Infinitives

A third type of verbal is the infinitive. Infinitives are formed by adjoining the word “to” and a verb. Infinitives can be used as nouns, adjectives or adverbs. Some examples:

To err is human. (“To err” is used as a noun subject.)

The quarterback hates to lose. (“To lose” is a noun used as a direct object.)

The detective said she had a lot to do. (“To do” is an adjective modifying “a lot.”)

We stopped at the diner to eat. (“To eat” is an adverb answering why.)

Writers and editors are taught to avoid splitting infinitives; that is, letting words come between “to” and its verb. In some cases, meanings are changed slightly. In others, the meaning can change or become fuzzy.

Examples of split infinitives include the following:

to really understand
to honestly tell you
to quickly shave
to finally arrive

By recognizing verbals and their functions, copy editors can prevent incomplete sentences, avoid awkward phrasing and place structures in parallel order.

Infinitives: verbals merging “to” and a verb; infinitives are used as nouns, adjectives or adverbs

Split Infinitives: occur when words come between “to” and its verb

PRONOUN-ANTECEDENT AGREEMENT

STUDY PREVIEW: *Copy editors check pronoun-antecedent agreement, concentrating on person, gender and number.*

Clarifying Pronouns

When working with pronouns, copy editors strive to keep pronoun references as clear as possible. In dealing with pronouns, copy editors identify antecedents and make it clear how the pronoun is linked to the antecedent.

Pronouns can be helpful as noun substitutes in sentences, but pronouns must agree with antecedents in person, gender and number. Here is an unclear sentence caused by a faulty reference to the antecedent:

Robin's mother told her she could not go.

Who could not go? The sentence has two pronouns — “her” and “she” — both referring to Robin. The sentence would be clearer if it read this way:

Robin's mother said Robin could not go.

Another confusing example:

Roy's horse Trigger died when he was 28.

Who was 28 — Roy or the horse?

Here is one possible clarification:

Roy's horse Trigger was 28 when he died.

“He” is a pronoun referring to the antecedent “Trigger.” “Roy's” is a possessive.

Another guideline for pronouns is to keep them close to their antecedents. For example:

Detective Green felt he was following valid clues, despite the doubts from his supervisor.

To clarify, move the second part of the sentence to the front, nearer to Detective Green:

Despite the doubts from his supervisor, Detective Green felt he was following valid clues.

Person

Agreement of person means that if the antecedent is singular, then the pronoun should be singular. The same applies to plural pronouns and antecedents.

Sometimes stories must be edited to avoid the clutter of “his” or “her.” A sentence like “Each teacher is responsible for writing their own lesson plan” can be edited to “All teachers are responsible for writing their own lesson plans.”

“One” is a word that might best be reserved for stilted English composition themes, but when it is used, “one” is often both the antecedent and pronoun. For example:

One must do what one feels one must do.

Incorrect: One must do what you feel you must do.

Here is an example of keeping the pronoun consistent:

If you see someone fitting the description, you should call the police.

Gender

A frequent problem occurs when reporters and copy editors grasp for the proper words to use to avoid seeming sexist. In a sentence such as “Every pilot knew to check his flight plan,” women pilots have been left out. Using “their” will not solve the dilemma because it is grammatically incorrect. The solution is to convert to plural:

“Pilots knew to check their flight plans.”

A problem with agreement in gender involves neither/nor. The best guideline is that the pronoun must agree with the number and gender of the noun that follows “nor”:

Neither the parents nor the two children wanted to do their part of the roadside cleanup.

Number

Number involves whether pronouns and antecedents are singular or plural. Singular antecedents are followed by singular pronouns, and plural pronouns need plural antecedents. To avoid awkward phrasing, copy editors often change both antecedents and pronouns. They check if verbs match pronouns and antecedents. An example of a

singular antecedent with a singular pronoun: Steve Martin (antecedent) forgot his (pronoun) lines.

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

STUDY PREVIEW: *Copy editors recognize when nouns and verbs do not agree and make adjustments according to style and grammar.*

Subjects and Predicates

Except in pithy sentences such as “Halt!” and “Stop!” every sentence has a subject and verb, with the subject either stated or understood. In these short sentences, the subject may be understood, leaving the verb standing alone as a command. A professor pointed out that this long sentence has an understood subject (you): Tune in, turn the radio dial to your favorite station and listen blissfully.

In some cases, the combination of subjects and verbs may sound acceptable to most audience members, but the copy editor checks whether the subject and verb agree according to standard usage and style. When subjects and verbs do not agree, readers often stumble over the unevenness of the sentence.

Rules regarding subject-verb agreement seem simple. A singular subject needs a singular verb, and a plural subject needs a plural verb. A verb must agree with its subject in number. To determine if the subject and verb agree, copy editors must:

- identify the subject.
- decide if the subject is singular or plural.
- select a verb to match the subject.

Here is a sentence from *Florida Today*:

The first hurricane of the Atlantic season blew across a string of Caribbean islands, apparently killing two surfers off Puerto Rico.

“Hurricane” is the subject, and “blew” is the verb.

If the sentence had read like this — *The first of several hurricanes expected during the Atlantic season blew across a string of islands* — then “first” would be the subject and “blew” the verb.

In the following sentence, note that someone in a hurry could confuse the subject and verb agreement:

The most talented group of free agents ever is poised to send NBA salaries through the roof today.

“Group” is the subject and “is poised” is the verb.

In finding the subject and matching it with the proper verb, copy editors often have to sort through several words to find the subject. For example, a sentence might contain an apposition:

John Holsterman, formerly the team’s vice president for player development, will replace Arlen Arstell as the team’s manager.

This sentence’s subject and verb are “John Holsterman” and “will replace.”

In recent years, some writers have used “his or her” or “his/her” more frequently. Sometimes those sentences appear rather awkward:

Everyone who drives to work should be eligible for his or her own parking place.

A grammatically incorrect alternative is:

Everyone who drives to work should be eligible for their own parking place.

A better option is:

Everyone who drives to work should be eligible for a parking place.

Again, copy editors can stress clarity by avoiding clutter.

Subjects and Predicate Nominatives

When the subject is plural and the predicate nominative is singular or the other way around, some writers find it hard to determine whether the verb should be singular or plural. The number of the verb should always agree with the number of the subject.

Note how the verb changes from singular to plural as we reverse the order of the subjects and predicate nominatives in these examples:

The team is Albertson, Brickowski, Celesto, Derrick and Elberts.
Albertson, Brickowski, Celesto, Derrick and Elberts are the team.

Predicate Nominative: a noun or its substitute that follows a linking verb and defines the subject

Subjects Following Verbs

Most sentences follow the S-V-O pattern, but in some cases, sentences begin with “here” or “there,” followed by a verb and then the subject. Examples:

Here comes the governor’s motorcade.
There goes Will Smith back stage.

Many writers have to resist turning “there” plus a verb, such as *there are*, into a contraction of “there’s.” For example:

There’s lots of sales going on today.
There’s storms forecast.

A smooth way to revise these sentences:

Lots of sales are going on today.
Storms are forecast.

Collective Nouns

Collective nouns take a singular form but have a plural meaning. They usually take singular verbs. Some collective nouns are army, audience, board, choir, class, club, council, couple, faculty, family, flock, group, jury, staff, team and United States. Sports teams with collective noun names include the Orlando Magic, the Miami Heat and the University of Alabama’s Crimson Tide. Marshall University has the Thundering Herd.

Collective Nouns: nouns that take a singular form but have a plural meaning

Since the collective noun is usually considered as a single unit working in agreement, use the singular verb. Use a singular verb also when the collective noun refers to a group operating as individuals or in disagreement. Examples:

The audience was quiet.
The Heat is expected to make the playoffs this season.

Simply Singular Subjects

Some pronouns when serving as subjects always take singular verbs: anyone, each, either, everyone, much, no one, nothing and someone.

Box 3-3

Alphabet Box (3 Acronyms for Copy Editors)

ABCs of writing and editing:

Accuracy
Brevity
Clarity

GSPS of copyediting:

Grammar
Spelling
Punctuation
Style

FAN BOYS conjunctions:

For
An
No
But
Or
Yet
So

Much was said at Mr. Stuckey's funeral.
Everyone was glad the hurricane changed course.

“It,” when serving as a subject, always goes with a singular verb.

It was time for the fireworks.

“The number” takes a singular verb, but “a number” takes a plural. “The number” appears to be one unit, while “a number” is indefinite but more than one.

The number of burglaries has decreased this year.
A number of burglars have been caught near Willow Grove.

Perennially Plural Subjects

Most compound subjects take a plural verb. However, they must meet some guidelines:

- if the compound subjects are joined by “and”
- if the subjects refer to different persons or things
- if the subjects cannot be considered a unit

For example:

Two seniors and one sophomore were suspended.

Indefinite pronouns, such as “both,” “few,” “many” and “several,” take plural verbs when used as subjects of sentences.

Few were chosen for the press pool.

By constantly being on guard for agreement between subjects and verbs, copy editors can prevent mistakes and embarrassment.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

A working knowledge of the language and the ability to apply language skills are important for copy editors.

Copy editors select straightforward words that are concise and precise to fit the story. Copy editors serve as translators of jargon, numbers and specialized terms. They know how to cut through clutter, clichés, redundancies and vague terms.

Copy editors double-check numbers to prevent errors, to explain numbers to the audience and to conform to style guides.

Copy editors manipulate parts of speech to make stories lively and interesting. Writers and editors work with verbs and nouns to form sentences and add adjectives and adverbs as modifiers to help complete word pictures.

All parts of speech, including verbals, are vital in construction of effective writing.

Copy editors check pronoun-antecedent agreement, concentrating on person, gender and number.

Copy editors recognize when nouns and verbs do not agree and make adjustments according to style and grammar.

Agreement is a concern of copy editors — both between nouns and verbs and between pronouns and antecedents.

For Further Reading

Norm Goldstein (ed.), *The Associated Press Stylebook* (New York: Basic Books, 2007).

Ron Hartung and Gerald Grow’s Newsroom 101.Com,
<<http://www.newsroom101.com>>.

William Strunk and E. B. White, *Elements of Style*, 4th ed. (Boston: AB Longman, 2000).

Kathleen Wickham, *Math Tools for Journalists* (Oak Park, IL: Marion Street Press, 2003).

Chapter 4 Learning Goals

- *Copy editors identify and work with various story formats, such as chronological, climactic, feature and personalized storytelling, and handle complex story structures, such as multiple-event stories, round-up stories and parallel narratives.*
- *Copy editors know advantages of the inverted pyramid and how to make the format appeal to the audience.*
- *The personalized approach is used by The Wall Street Journal and other publications to interest readers in otherwise dry subjects and to humanize a story.*
- *Copy editors work with nonlinear story organization for the World Wide Web.*
- *Because public relations persons send messages to news media hoping to enhance an organization's reputation, careful editing of the products is necessary.*
- *Broadcast editors use many of the same skills as editors for print or the Web, and they must be aware of condensing stories for people to hear or view.*

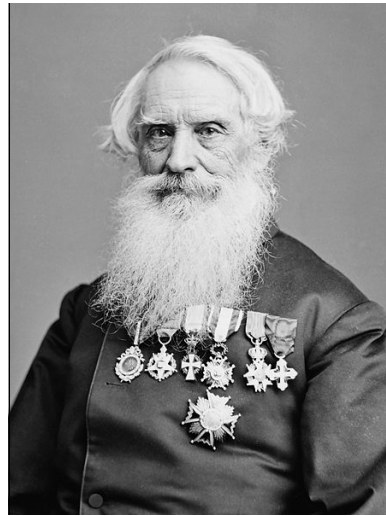


EDITING MEDIA FORMATS

On May 24, 1844, Samuel F. B. Morse sent a message on his telegraph machine from Washington to Baltimore that was printed as a news story in the *Baltimore Patriot*. But neither he nor anyone else could have predicted that his invention eventually would have a major impact on the way newspaper reporters wrote their stories.

About 20 years later, reporters covering the American Civil War developed a story organizational structure that came to be called the inverted pyramid. Tired and frustrated with chronological stories being interrupted by the military cutting telegraph transmissions, editors insisted battlefield reporters write their stories with the most important information first. That way, if the troops cut the telegraph line or a storm downed a line, the newspaper still would receive enough information to tell readers what happened. Reporters could send less important facts later. This strong organizational form replaced flowery essays and lives today as the most used format for news.

Copy editors are like building inspectors as they examine stories to see whether they are constructed soundly enough for public consumption. They check whether the building materials are placed together in the proper order and are fastened together with good transitions. Copy editors serve their audiences by ensuring stories are fresh, understandable, informative and interesting.



Samuel F. B. Morse

When stories are organized logically with beginnings, middles and ends, readers will enjoy reading them and will read more of them. Some editors argue that inverted pyramid stories really do not have endings because they just taper off. When copy editors find any stumbling blocks to impede the flow of the story, they fix the problem.

In order to present clear, coherent, complete stories, copy editors rely on organizational devices such as transitions, bullets, subheads and lift-out quotes.

Audience members also like some variety, so storytellers can heighten interest by presenting stories using various formats. The inverted pyramid, considered the best format to use for single-event spot news, has survived into the age of the Internet. This age-old format and other forms are discussed in this chapter.

INVERTED PYRAMID

STUDY PREVIEW: *Through the years, the inverted pyramid has proved its value. Most copy editors are aware of its advantages, and they know how to edit it to appeal to readers.*

Inverted pyramid stories are structured so that the latest and most important information is presented first in the summary lead. The five Ws and H — Who, What, When, Where, Why and How — appear in the story in descending order of importance until the story is told.

This time-tried format works well for copy editors. When the lead information tells the essence of the story, it is easier for copy editors to identify key ideas and encapsulate them in the headline. This makes writing heads quicker because copy editors don't have to search the whole story to find the most important information.

The inverted pyramid allows copy editors to remove text from the end of the story if they need to trim to fit space. Also, as copy editors read through an inverted pyramid story, they double-check leads to see if the lead indeed tells the most important and interesting information.

Most summary leads present the facts in a straightforward manner, but sometimes delayed identification, also called blind leads, are used. Blind or delayed ID leads might give a person's identifying information in the lead but name him or her in the second paragraph. Here is an example of a blind lead: A college freshman was arrested Friday for setting fire to his dorm room.

Broadcast copy is often shortened to fit strict time constraints by cutting from the bottom of the story. Radio and television personnel are careful they do not edit out material that refers to video footage or graphics.

Box 4.1

Inverted Pyramid Example

This six-paragraph story in inverted pyramid style could be trimmed from the bottom in several places without the reader wondering what was missing.

NEW ORLEANS — A tanker carrying 6 million gallons of crude oil leaked about 800,000 gallons near a wildlife area Sunday, a day after it ran aground in a storm in the Gulf of Mexico.

Numerous shellfish and several birds were killed along Louisiana's coast near the Texas border. Other birds were seen covered with oil, and fishing has been banned.

The spill is the worst in Louisiana's history, according to Environmental Protection Agency officials.

The barge stopped just off Marsh Island, home of the Marsh Island State Wildlife Refuge, and not far from Shell Keys National Wildlife Refuge.

Earlier Saturday, officials had estimated that a relatively small amount of oil leaked from the 340-foot barge.

"When we had an opportunity to board the barge, we found that there are in fact considerable breaches in the bottom of the vessel. During low tide, we expect to get a significantly greater increase in oil loss," Joseph Black, who is heading the barge salvage operation, said at a news conference.

Although the inverted pyramid is widely used, reporters sometimes construct their stories in an unorganized manner. That's when copy editors must go to work to reorganize the material.

Here is an example of an unorganized story from the front page of a college newspaper. Names have been changed in this story.

A sense of urgency surrounded the Wednesday, Student Government Association meeting as members rushed through routine business to get to the one big item on the agenda, an attempted override of SGA President Ben Therre's veto of a bill expressing official SGA disfavor of ABC's proposed name change.

"I had many positive comments from ABC students about the motion discussed in last week's meeting. There are many students who feel they need to be represented in this decision. The motion was for a recommendation to be given by SGA to the Name Change Committee and the President of the College that the name Alberta Brown College stay the same," Richie Awtry, a Madison

pre-med senior, said as he began the debate on whether to override the presidential veto.

“However, the president of the SGA vetoed this motion and I feel we need to override the veto as a senate and as the representative of the student body. The students should be allowed to feel they have a voice in a decision that might affect their future,” Awtry said.

The story continues for three long paragraphs, then:

The debate continued with arguments both for and against the motion to override the veto. However, when the debate ended and a vote was (taken) the motion failed 21-11, one vote shy of an override. **(Here is the lead, in the seventh paragraph.)**

Copy editors like inverted pyramid leads because they tell the gist of the story, giving them a quick reference on whether the rest of the story flows clearly and logically.

After approving or fixing the lead, the copy editor will seek answers for some questions, such as:

- If the lead was a delayed identification lead, are specific details given later?
- Does the lead fit the story?
- Does the story make sense?
- Are there any unanswered questions?
- Are transitions smooth? Are more transitions needed?
- Are any paragraphs obviously out of place?
- Could the story play up a local angle?

CHRONOLOGICAL FORMAT

STUDY PREVIEW: *The chronological account presents the story in the order it happened.*

Many people grew up listening to stories that begin with “once upon a time” and ending with “they all lived happily ever after.” This type of story begins at the beginning and unravels events until it reaches the end. This contrasts with the inverted pyramid, which places the main news in the lead and follows with details in descending order. In a chronology, the main news can occur anywhere.

Some chronological stories start at the beginning. Others begin with a brief, informative, interesting lead that sets the tone and entices readers to continue, then uses

a transition to the chronological account. The story then follows in chronological order until it is all told. The chronology can close with a summary or end like an inverted pyramid — simply run out of facts.

When working with this format, the copy editor can ask several questions:

- Is the chronology the best way to tell this story?
- Are the transitions smooth? Do they serve a purpose?
- Is the story in chronological order?
- Does the ending fit the story?

Here is a five-sentence chronological item:

CHEYENNE – Garth Strait decided to risk injury rather than disappoint his fans Friday night at the state fair.

Although he had suffered a broken arm in Houston and a sprained ankle in El Paso, Strait, 52, gave the impression his wounds were healed and he was ready to return to his championship form.

Wanting to give a good performance in his last event of the season, Strait waved to the fans as he entered the chute to mount Diablo, the toughest bull in the rodeo.

Strait’s brief ride began smoothly but soon turned to disaster. Diablo threw Strait off after 10 seconds and attacked the fallen rider with its horns and hooves.

Strait is in intensive care in a local hospital.

PERSONALIZED “DOW JONES” APPROACH

STUDY PREVIEW: *The personalized Dow Jones approach is frequently used by The Wall Street Journal and other publications to interest readers in otherwise dry subjects and to humanize a story.*

Another method of telling stories is *The Wall Street Journal*’s personalized approach, sometimes referred to as “Dow Jonesing.” Sometimes the format is called the “micro-macro” approach. Adopted by other publications, this method is used to interest readers in otherwise dry subjects and to put a human face on a subject.

The personalized approach begins by focusing on one individual who has a problem or has learned to cope.

“Dow Jonesing”:
personalized approach to a story, starting with an individual, making a transition to a larger issue and returning to the individual

Then the story makes a transition to the larger issue, followed by a report on the larger issue. Usually the story returns to the opening character for the close. A story might deal with how inner-city small merchants are faring during a slumping economy.

An example of a front-page *Wall Street Journal* personalized story by Jon Bigness tells about “outlaw” bed and breakfast operations. The story opens with an introduction to Barbara Marquard, who ran a bed and breakfast out of her Chicago Lake Shore Drive condominium. After some quotes by Marquard, the writer moves from focusing on an individual to the larger issue of “outlaw” bed and breakfast operations.

The story continues reporting on the larger issue through several paragraphs, including a jump to the back page of the section. This story ends with an individual operator who is not Marquard as an example.

Personalized approaches could center on a survivor of a hurricane and flood and expand to include other disaster victims and other details of the storm. Another example could be a farm family dealing with problems of trying to run an independent farm and then show the “big picture” of independent farms, or a story could focus on one homeless person and extend it to the problems of all homeless in a city.

On college campuses, stories could begin with one student having difficulties receiving financial aid or a student who has become pregnant during her sophomore year and then expand to cover the broader issues affecting the campus.

Copy editors will find these stories are not nearly so easy to trim as the inverted pyramid. Copy editors who recognize the steps in the personalized approach are aware the story will eventually come back to near its starting point, either with the same or a different character. Possibly, the best places to trim are in the middle. Personalized stories usually make interesting reading.

CLIMACTIC FORMAT

STUDY PREVIEW: *Climactic stories save the main news until last, giving the audience an element of surprise.*

Climactic story organization saves the main news element until the end. This format is popular in mysteries. Sheila Alexander, a writer for *The Gramblinite* of Grambling State University, saved the latest, most important angle in this story about retired football player Charlie Joiner:

Climactic Format: story organized so that the main news element is at the end

From Charlie Joiner’s first catch during high school, coach Wiley Stewart knew Joiner one day would be a star. Joiner’s love for the game of football

began at a young age, forming his skills at Boston High School in Lake Charles.

Joiner would eventually continue his career at Grambling State University, where he took the Southwestern Athletic Conference by storm in all offensive categories.

“Stewart told me Charlie was a good receiver and could play,” said Coach Eddie Robinson.

Though Joiner was a Grambling Tiger for only three years, he left a lasting impression on everyone who saw him play.

From 1966 through 1968, Joiner led the Tigers to three consecutive championships and a National Black College Championship in 1967, while the team amassed a record of 24-5-1.

Despite being 5’11” and 188 pounds, he was one of the team’s biggest offensive producers. Named to the First Team All-SWAC three years, Joiner also led the team in receiving and scoring.

Though 1966 was his best year statistically, as he hauled down 34 passes for 822 yards along with 54 points, he never stopped striving for his ultimate goal, the NFL.

He was drafted by Houston in the 1969 football draft.

Due to an injury during his rookie year, Joiner was sidelined with a broken arm, unable to help his Oiler teammates. He would quickly make his presence felt, leading the Oilers with 684 receiving yards and seven touchdowns during the 1970-71 campaign.

Joiner was soon known around the NFL as the guy with the magical hands, as he finished the 1972 season with Cincinnati. During his three years with Cincinnati, Joiner snagged 37 passes for 725 yards. Before ending his pro career with the San Diego Chargers, he held several receiving records.

As a tribute to his success in the NFL, Joiner was inducted into the Hall of Fame Sunday.

A copy editor might look at this story and say that it is backward — the most important and recent part is at the end. The copy editor can either return the story to have it rewritten or accept it. Many copy editors would prefer starting with Joiner’s being chosen for the Hall of Fame, followed by background information.

If the copy editor decides to go with the climactic story, then she will check to see if the story is told in order and be sure that the headline does not give away the key element. One idea to consider is whether the surprise at the end makes it worth writing an entire story in a suspenseful manner.

FEATURE APPROACH

STUDY PREVIEW: *Some news stories are suited for a feature approach with emphasis on subject matter that is uplifting, sad or joyous.*

Some news stories lend themselves to a feature approach. Often these are human interest stories that appeal to readers' emotions because their subject matter is uplifting, sad or joyous.

Feature Story: a story that usually entertains more than it informs

This example is about a pastor turning a night club into a church. By getting some quotes from the minister, the writer presented an enjoyable story that was widely read.

GRAND RIVERS, Ky. – A local minister and his flock are turning a “den of iniquity” into a place of worship.

The Rev. George Freeman and his congregation in the Mount Zion Christian Church have purchased the former Que Stick nightclub near Kentucky Lake and have begun converting it into a church.

Freeman says turning the formerly infamous club from “a place of ill repute into a place of comfort, joy and peace” is one of his greatest accomplishments as a minister.

The 150-member congregation Sunday held worship services in the building's large kitchen. Pews and carpet are being installed in the new auditorium, the club's former dance floor.

“It's not a devil-worshipping place anymore,” said Alma Brown, the church organist.

The Que Stick closed last year for violating state alcoholic beverage laws. The lounge was a common site for late night stabbings, shootings and other crimes. The church members are changing the building's atmosphere by removing blue lights, pool tables and numerous pictures and drawings considered inappropriate by the congregation.

“It was a pleasurable experience,” Freeman said. “The more we got into it, the more we enjoyed it. We are going to be very proud of our efforts.”

During cleanup, Freeman found a pitchfork from a Halloween devil costume in a corner. He showed the item to church members.

“Look at this,” Freeman said. “We frightened the devil so much that he left in such a hurry that he forgot his fork.”

Another example of a story with a feature approach is about a couple of high school sweethearts who married after 50 years. Another story could be about veterans

losing benefits because of a cutback in funds. Possibilities to put feature angles on stories are practically endless.

In dealing with featurized news stories, copy editors decide whether the stories should have the feature approach or be handled as straight news stories. Careful trimming is essential, and copy editors can have fun writing headlines for feature stories.

HOURLASS STRUCTURE

STUDY PREVIEW: *Hourglass stories begin as inverted pyramids and shift to chronologies near the middle.*

Stories in the hourglass format are a cross between an inverted pyramid and a chronological account. Opening paragraphs are presented according to order of importance, but then, in the middle of the hourglass, the structure changes. After most of the five Ws and H questions are answered, the writer switches to a chronology. The format can be used for longer news stories, sports event coverage and features.

Hourglass: story structure beginning with an inverted pyramid and shifting to chronological order

This sports story is written in the hourglass format:

DUBACH, La. – Mudbug, a son of Cajun Crawfish, ground out a Dubach Derby victory Saturday by a split second.

The victory extended to six Dwight D’Urberville’s streak of victories in the Dubach Derby. However, extension of the winning streak was not certain until the final breathtaking second before a roaring crowd of 4,666 at Dubach Downs.

The finish was so close that Jeremy Stevens on Mudbug and Mort Martin on second-place Elephant Walk thought the race was ending in a dead heat.

The official margin was a nose, and it had to be a small nose.

“I didn’t cheer when I crossed the finish line, because I didn’t know if I won,” Stevens said.

Crawfish Gumbo, another son of Cajun Crawfish, finished fifth, extending the streak of beaten favorites to 17, dating back to Steeple Glen’s win.

Earl Nafzger, who trained Cajun Crawfish, the 1990 winner, was not surprised by the upset. Nafzger said that while Crawfish Gumbo looks more like his sire, Mudbug’s racing style was more similar to their father’s.

“I’ve never, never been prouder,” said D’Urberville. “It’s the highlight of my career to win this one for Sam Young and Overlook Farm.”

The 78-year-old Young, winning his first Dubach Derby, bred Mudbug at his Overlook Farm near Owensboro, Ky.

Racing as a Young-owned entry with Notebook, Mudbug was one of five starters saddled by D'Urberville, a Derby record. D'Urberville's other horses' finishes were: Prince Valiant, third; Notebook, sixth; Eleanor Rigby, 10th, and Morning Glory, 18th in the 19-horse field. It was the second consecutive year D'Urberville's horses finished first and third in the Derby.

[Now the bottom part of the hourglass begins.]

Stevens held Mudbug close to the rail in the run down the backstretch but was back in the pack as Morning Glory led, followed by Ironic Bionic and Elephant Walk.

As the field hit the half-mile pole, Stevens guided Mudbug to the rail as Elephant Walk took the lead. On the final turn, Mudbug began his winning drive by passing horses. At the top of the stretch, he moved to the middle to charge toward the finish line.

With about a 16th of a mile to go, Stevens raced Mudbug past the tiring Elephant Walk. The runner-up had appeared ready to win when Mudbug came charging up on the outside to grab the glory and the bluebonnet bouquet.

Mudbug covered 1 1/4 miles on a fast track in 2:01 and paid \$13.80, \$6 and \$4. Elephant Walk paid \$6.20 and \$4.40 after finishing 3 1/2 lengths in front of Prince Valiant, paying \$4.60. Fourth place Walking on Sunshine was another head back.

With hourglass stories, copy editors look for clarity, completeness and structure flaws, especially repeats of details. Copy editors check if the top of the hourglass is interesting enough to pull the audience into the chronological account.

PARALLEL NARRATIVES

STUDY PREVIEW: Parallel narratives follow two story lines at once. They may be used for comparisons.

Parallel narratives merge two story lines, presenting a copy editor with special challenges. The copy editor must keep the stories straight, especially so the readers can visualize both stories.

The format could be used to trace actions of two sports teams as they prepare for a climactic face-off in a

Parallel Narratives:
story structure following two story lines at the same time; can be used to compare and contrast

championship game. The same approach could be used to compare and contrast competitors in chess or ice-skating or other meetings — even politicians preparing to debate.

Good storytellers catch and keep the reader’s attention by having a lively lead, colorful scenes, interesting anecdotes, realistic dialogue and a chronological order. Parallel narratives were used in Truman Capote’s classic “In Cold Blood,” but the stories do not have to be murder mysteries to apply the technique.

Extended comparisons usually fit one of two organizational patterns: point-by-point or parallel order. When the point-by-point method is employed, the persons, places or things being compared are presented one point at a time with the first point of Person A followed by the first point of Person B and so on. Parallel order means that all points of A will be discussed, followed by all points of B, with points presented in the same order.

Parallel narratives may be similar to compare-and-contrast essays many college and high school students are required to write.

Copy editors handling parallel narratives need to be alert to who is taking which actions. They can devise lists or brief diagrams to keep track of actions. The main point to remember is to avoid confusion for the readers.

COMPLEX STORY STRUCTURES

STUDY PREVIEW: *Copy editors handle complex story structures, such as multiple-event stories, roundup stories and parallel narratives.*

Multiple-Event Story

Not all stories are single-event or single-element stories. Some more complex stories dealing with councils, boards, legislatures and committees cover several subjects that occurred in one session. Sometimes the actions are related, but often the actions are diverse. It is difficult for the reporter to decide which elements to put in the lead.

Multiple-Event Story: a story containing more than one important element or point

The reporter may choose one of several ways to handle this type of story:

- **Several Stories.** Taking this approach depends upon available time and space and upon the reporter’s assigning editor. The reporter could write a main story accompanied by a sidebar, a secondary story intended to run with a major story of the same topic.

- **Summary Box.** Such a box would be displayed along with the main story. The box could contain a list of the major actions.
- **Multiple-Element Story.** This story deals with all the actions.

Copy editors sometimes are involved in deciding which option to take. The story with a box option could be the simplest and quickest to handle. Multiple-element stories can turn a bit tricky.

Let’s assume city council met and approved three projects. If the reporter chooses one action to highlight in the lead, he or she would write a summary lead, followed by a paragraph that mentions other key points. Some reporters try to place all important actions in the lead, but crowded leads can confuse the audience. Supporting material would elaborate on the actions in the same order in which they first appear in the story.

The first two or three paragraphs of a multi-element story determine the arrangement of the rest of the story. To keep the story straight, the writer fleshes out details of the story in the same order in which they were introduced to the readers.

A key function of the copy editor in multi-event stories is to be sure the facts are presented in an easy-to-follow order. Transitions are very important in these stories.

Roundup Stories

To save space, copy editors sometimes combine related stories into one story, called a “roundup.”

A copy editor could localize an AP story about a hurricane that hit the region, adding accidents reported in the local area, along with school and business closings.

Election results and sports scores lend themselves to roundups.

USA Today presented a weather roundup story dealing with floods in Oregon and a request for disaster relief in Indiana. The lead stated that “rains pounded the Pacific Northwest and Indiana’s governor declared his battered state a disaster area.”

After quoting a Weather Services Corp. official and mentioning snow predicted in the East, the story took an “Elsewhere Tuesday” bullet approach. The story highlighted Oregon’s floods, Tennessee’s record cold spell, the South thawing, the Midwest’s above-freezing temperatures and a crop prediction. It said Indiana’s governor asked the President for federal funds and at least 91 deaths could be blamed on the weather.

In working with roundup or wrap-up stories, copy editors ask:

- Does the lead fit the story?
- Do items mentioned in the lead appear later?

Roundup Story: story covering several similar events, such as a weather roundup, holiday deaths or voting results

- Is there a relationship among the stories covered?
- Can the large story be effectively broken into smaller elements, such as one large story with two sidebars?
- Do the news items lend themselves to a bullet format of presentation?

For roundup stories, copy editors use transitions, bullets and sometimes subheads in order to make the copy more readable.

Briefs

Copy editors often compile briefs from much longer stories. This action involves careful trimming in order to retain the meanings of the stories. Readers may see various types of briefs in the newspaper — people, sports, nation, state, world and local. Copy editors select and size photographs to accompany the briefs. Some newspapers give copy editors credit for creating briefs sections, labeling them “Edited by Erica Erickson” or “Edited by Ernesto Fuentes.”

Briefs: stories that are only a few paragraphs long; usually are run in related groups

Editors coordinate so that both long and brief versions of the same story will not appear and similar briefs will not appear in two sections of the newspaper. Briefs provide readers with a wider selection of stories. Broadcasters often use briefs so they can offer their audiences more stories.

Sidebars

Another type of story copy editors encounter is the sidebar, a brief story that accompanies a major story. The sidebar is related to the main story, but it usually focuses on an angle not covered in the primary story. Often the sidebar is set off in a box. Readers often are more likely to read sidebars than longer articles. Sometimes readers will notice the sidebar first and decide to read the longer story.

Sidebar: brief secondary story, often boxed, that runs with a major story of a related topic; usually focuses on an angle not covered in the primary story

Copy editors examine sidebars to determine:

- Are they related to the main story?
- Do they offer new information?
- Are they interesting?
- Do they conform to style and usage standards?
- Do they fit well in a “package”?

Box 4.3

Sidebar Example

This sidebar story could appear alongside larger stories and photos about the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita.

The commander of the military’s hurricane relief effort Saturday saw firsthand the punishment dealt by hurricanes Katrina and then Rita to the land southeast of New Orleans down the Mississippi River into the Gulf of Mexico.

Army Lt. Gen. Russel Honore toured Plaquemines Parish by truck and helicopter. “To these people, the crisis is still going on,” Honore said. “They haven’t gotten to the recovery part yet.”

About 16,000 of 28,000 parish residents remained displaced, said Parish President Benny Rousselle. The parish took a direct hit Aug. 29 from Katrina, and then suffered more flooding about a month later from Rita. About 30-40 percent of the parish remains flooded.

The parish is home for oil refineries and seafood production.

“This is critical terrain,” Honore said. “It’s critical to our nation.”

Coast Guard and Army helicopters patched levee breaks in the 80-mile-long parish by dropping sandbags. Other helicopters are on their way from Texas, Honore said.

The Corps of Engineers is involved in the cleanup and restoration efforts.

An example of a sidebar would be a small story informing readers of how to apply for relief after a major disaster, such as Hurricane Katrina or Rita. The main story might cover the overall hurricane situation, while readers could key in on the sidebar and similar accompanying small stories for useful information.

Online Digests

Some online news sites present news items in digest form. Digests are summaries of stories similar to briefs. If readers want more information, they often can click on links, key words that guide them to more in-depth, longer versions of the stories.

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVICES

STUDY PREVIEW: *Copy editors can use organizational devices, such as transitions, bullets and subheads, to keep stories flowing smoothly.*

Transitions

Inverted pyramid-style stories may not need as many transitions as some other types of stories in order to deliver the facts, but good transitions can improve a story and help it flow smoothly and coherently. Transitions can be one word or an entire sentence.

Transitions: words, phrases or sentences that guide readers smoothly through stories

Regardless of their length, good transitions guide readers from one point or one subject to another without the readers being aware of the shift. If stories are choppy or not well unified, reporters and copy editors need to work on transitions. A few properly placed words can eliminate screeching, lurching or bumping from the readers' path.

Relationships between connecting paragraphs can vary. For instance, one paragraph can support its predecessor or oppose it. A second paragraph can elaborate on the first one. Paragraphs can follow each other because they are arranged in time sequence or in order of importance. Some stories may follow a spatial sequence, during which transitions can help guide readers in a certain direction.

Some coordinating conjunctions that serve as transitions when they are placed between two clauses are: for, and, nor, but, or, yet and so. These FAN BOYS can come to the editor's rescue to prevent run-on sentences and sentence fragments.

Some transitions showing similarity include: likewise, similarly, in the same way.

Some neutralizing transitions are: in spite of, meanwhile, nevertheless, regardless of, still, unfortunately.

Transitions showing contrast include, but are not limited to, the following: after all, although, conversely, however, instead, nevertheless, in spite of, on the other hand, not only.

These transitions show consequence: hence, consequently, therefore, as a result of, in conclusion and thus.

Some supporting transitions are besides, for example, for instance, furthermore, in addition, not only, but also.

Transitions showing sequence are next, subsequently, after, finally, first, second.

Bullets

Bullets can help copy editors organize stories. They provide a means of organizing series of related points. Here are some tips about bullets:

Bullets: small, dark circles that set off points from the rest of the story

- Bullets can be used occasionally to stress points.
- Each point must be brief enough to be expressed in two or three lines.
- Parallel structure is needed in a series of bulleted items.
- Usually, bullets are used when the editor calls attention to three or more points.

An alternative to bullets is a numbered list: 1, 2, 3. When copy editors find the material won't fit these conditions, they usually stick to normal paragraphs.

Attention Getters

Subheads. Subheads often are used to break up long areas of gray copy. Usually they are set in 12- to 18-point type. Subheads can be simple labels to name the topic in the next paragraph or they can summarize key points. Subheads can be centered or flush left.

Initial letters. Initial letters are large letters used to begin paragraphs to catch readers' attention and to add variety to sections of copy. Initial letters, also known as initial caps or drop caps, sometimes are as tall as six lines of copy. Initial letters can be sunken or raised.

Lift-out Quotes. Lift-out quotations, also known as breakout quotes, pullout quotations, quoteouts or blurbs, are passages from the main text that are run in larger type. Usually a strong quote is used for emphasis.

These quotes provide an opportunity to catch readers' eyes. They add variety to makeup, and they break up gray copy. If the quote is direct, quote marks are provided, along with the name and identification of the speaker. Most such quotes are boxed, and some are shaded.

A story about crime in *The Daily Helmsman* at the University of Memphis contained this lift-out quote:

“People don't need to leave stuff where it can be seen.”
—Roger Fowler, Public Safety Director

This lift-out quote appeared under a photo of TV reporter Desiree Robinson in the “Variety” section of *The Blue and White Flash* of Jackson State University in Mississippi:

“My skin color alone carries a tremendous amount of responsibility. I know that my people will be my worst critics and my best critics.”

Links

Links are used extensively on the Internet to refer readers to further information and related sites. Links can provide readers with additional information that might not fit neatly on one online page without viewers having to scroll.

PRODUCING PUBLIC RELATIONS PRODUCTS

STUDY PREVIEW: *Because public relations persons send messages to the news media hoping to inform and educate the public and enhance an organization’s reputation, careful editing of the information is necessary.*

Studies have shown that as much as 60 percent of all news appearing in the media originates as press releases. Releases can come from public relations operations with the mission of creating positive public perceptions of their clients. One type of public relations office is the external public relations agency staffed by many people and serving various clients. Some organizations have internal staffs of public relations specialists, while others rely on part-time volunteers to contact media outlets. For example, a civic club might designate a press liaison to spread news of the group’s activities.

Although many of the people creating public relations materials do not have an “editor” title, they should be aware of the importance of being accurate, complete and truthful. Public relations practitioners need the same skills and abilities editors require, so the information covered in this book applies to people performing editing tasks in public relations as well as all news media.

Some materials created for public relations purposes include press releases, press advisories, public service announcements (PSAs), brochures, newsletters, magazines, speeches, fact sheets, advertisements and annual reports. Some public relations practitioners produce video news releases and perform other functions.

Box 4.3

Tips for Press Releases

1. Write one sentence per paragraph and keep sentences short.
2. Emphasize accuracy, brevity and clarity. Do not use jargon.
3. Get to the point immediately. Tell the story in a few paragraphs.
4. Accentuate the positive and downplay the negative.
5. Stress any local angles.
6. Do not begin the story with the name of an organization official — for example, don't start with "James Jones, CEO of Jones Jacket Company, announced today..."
7. Use good, short quotes but do not repeat information already provided in the text.
8. Provide a point of contact, along with telephone numbers, e-mail address and fax number.
9. Add a fact box and a photo when appropriate.
10. Send the release to the person most likely to be receptive to your release and the preferred method of receiving it. Do not call to see if they received your release or when they plan to use it.

Press Releases

A good press release is a concise, complete description of an upcoming event, a timely report of an event that has just occurred, notification of important personnel or procedural changes in an organization, or other news or feature tips, according to the *Los Angeles Times* editorial staff.

Many press releases are written in the inverted pyramid format, which places the most important information in the lead paragraph. The lead needs a hook to lure the media editor into reading the entire story and deciding to use it. Although some organization officials might insist on their names being in the lead, they need to be convinced that positive news of the organization is more important than their names in print. Some releases are topped with a catchy, informative headline to attract the media person's attention. Just a few words can summarize the press release. Each paragraph should add more facts. A person assigned to edit press releases would check for accuracy and completeness and ensure that the five W and H questions are answered.

Every press release should contain contact information, including a name, phone numbers, fax numbers and e-mail. A date and the words "for immediate release" lets the media person know the news is fresh and can be used upon receipt.

Marcia Yudkin, author of *6 Steps to Free Publicity*, talks about the “Yes, but what is it?” syndrome. Nothing is more irritating than seeing constant references to a product name or service name but no information about that product or service, she wrote. The reader needs to be able to visualize a new product or service. This is particularly critical for launches (announcements of new offerings). The writer should ask someone unfamiliar with the product or service to read the release and then describe the product or service in their own words. News media copy editors will reject the release if they cannot understand it.

Proofread! This is an easily forgotten, but extremely important, step. Always proofread the work before issuing the release. Better yet, give the document to someone else (perhaps a copy editor) who can readily spot spelling and grammatical errors. Nothing signals a lack of professionalism more than a message filled with errors.

Some reasons why press releases are not used:

- lack of a local angle
- insufficient or inaccurate information (who, what, when, where, why, how)
- failure to include contact information for the organization
- verbosity
- lack of timeliness — the editor’s deadline has passed or the news is released too long after the event

Public relations writers and editors should be aware of wordiness — balance brevity against failure to include necessary information. Here is the type of wordy phrasing to avoid: “On occasions when specialized personnel or additional personnel are needed to meet tight schedule requirements, we can draw upon the resources of two other offices for assistance.” The writer could have trimmed the text to this: “Our two branch offices can provide expert assistance that will keep your project on target and on deadline.” This version is leaner, cleaner and has more impact.

Wordiness happens when the writer

- wants to sound sophisticated or formal.
- is nervous or unsure about the clarity of the message.
- has not reviewed the work for redundancies.
- becomes attached to particular phrases.
- has added padding to make the work appear impressive or substantial.

Box 4.4 is a sample press release. Note that some of the content, especially abbreviations, may differ from AP style.

Box 4.4

Example of Press Release



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Office of Communications

1849 C Street NW
Washington DC 20240

202 208-6843 phone
202 219-0910 fax

National Park Service News Release

For Immediate Release: May 5, 2008

Contact(s): David Barna or Kathy Kupper, 202 208-6843

Battlefield Preservation Grants for 2008 Announced

National Park Service (NPS) Director Fran Mainella today announced the award of \$350,000 in grants to 11 groups working to protect and preserve historic American battlefields.

The grants are designed to help safeguard significant battlefield lands as symbols of national heritage and individual sacrifice. The funds will support a variety of projects at battle sites in Manassas, Unison, and Appomattox, VA, San Jacinto, TX, Fort Phil Kearny, WY, Bushy Run, PA, Two Bridges, NJ, Brown's Mill, GA, Frenchtown, WA, northern Florida, and Peleliu in Palau.

The awards are administered by the NPS American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP), which promotes the preservation of noteworthy sites connected to wars on American soil. Since 1990, the ABPP and its partners have helped to protect and enhance more than 100 battlefields by co-sponsoring 306 projects in 37 states and the District of Columbia.

Educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, federal, state, local, and tribal governments are eligible to apply for the battlefield grants. Information about the individual grants and the ABPP is available at <http://www.cr.nps.gov/hps/abpp/>.

-NPS

Box 4.5

Example of a Public Service Announcement

Date: May 5, 2008
Life Share Blood Center
123 Fourth Street
Sunnydale, Florida 37137
Contact: Ellen Ellenstein
Telephone: 321-456-7899
E-mail: ellenellen@aol.com

20-SECOND MESSAGE

Announcer: Because of the recent severe weather in the area, there is a shortage of

blood in central Florida. All blood types are needed. You can be a hero and save a

life. Call 456-7890 for more information.

Date: May 5, 2008
Life Share Blood Center
123 Fourth Street
Sunnydale, Florida 37137
Contact: Ellen Ellenstein
Telephone: 321-456-7899
E-mail: ellenellen@aol.com

10-SECOND MESSAGE

Announcer: Central Florida is experiencing a severe shortage of blood. You can be a hero and save a life. Call 456-7890 for more information.

Public Service Announcements

Another way to get free publicity is by sending public service announcements (PSAs) to broadcast outlets. PSAs are messages ranging in length from 10 to 60 seconds telling about activities of a community nonprofit group. For example, a PSA might alert radio

listeners that it is Girl Scout cookie time and tell listeners who to contact for cookies. The announcement should include information for a contact person, along with phone numbers, fax number and e-mail address. Close editing is needed to prevent the organization from being embarrassed by errors.

The announcements should answer these questions:

- What is the action/event?
- Who is sponsoring the activity?
- Where will it be?
- When is it scheduled?
- Why is the event scheduled?
- What is the benefit for the public?

Rough estimates for the number of words needed for time slots are: 10 seconds = 25 words; 30 seconds = 80 words; and one minute = 160 words.

Other public relations products, especially those with a long potential shelf-life, such as annual reports, brochures, newsletters and magazines, must be accurate and complete. They also must portray the organization in a positive light and appeal to the intended audiences.

EDITING FOR BROADCAST

STUDY PREVIEW: *Broadcast editors use many of the same skills as editors for print or the Web, and they must be aware of condensing stories and preparing them for people to hear or view.*

Editors for broadcast require many of the skills and characteristics necessary for editing in print or for the Web. For example, they must have a good working knowledge of the language, ability to make gatekeeping decisions and an awareness of the medium's audience. They must know how to fix flaws in grammar, spelling, punctuation and style.

Broadcasters strive to deliver information with immediacy and accuracy. The first commitment of the broadcast journalist should be to accuracy. People prepare copy for broadcast work under time constraints and against deadlines. They must see that messages are delivered accurately the first time, since, unlike print or Web readers, most listeners or viewers have one chance to hear the news.

Some broadcast stories follow the inverted pyramid format. The broadcast headline or first sentence aims to capture the attention of the viewers or listeners. It usually is followed by a capsule and then the details. The most common format for broadcast news is the dramatic unity structure consisting of climax, cause and effect.

Box 4.6

Example of Broadcast Copy

Directions

Script

CU ON WILSON

GOOD EVENING, I'M ANGELA
WILSON WITH YOUR CHANNEL 10
NIGHTLY UPDATE.

ROLL TAPE OF MAYOR

VO

MONROE MAYOR JAMIE MAYO
ANNOUNCED TODAY THAT THE
CITY HAS RECEIVED A FEDERAL
GRANT TO BUILD A NEW BRIDGE
OVER THE OUACHITA
(WATCH-A-TAW) RIVER. MAYO
SAID MONROE'S CITY COUNCIL AND
AREA LEGISLATORS HAVE BEEN
WORKING FOR A LONG TIME
TO FIND FUNDS FOR THE PROJECT.
THE INITIAL GRANT FROM THE
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
IS FOR SEVENTY MILLION DOLLARS.
THE STATE HAS PROMISED
MATCHING FUNDS, THE MAYOR
SAID.

Some broadcast journalists think of their stories as completed circles. Many radio newscasts are less than five minutes long, including commercials. Some viewers might think they are getting a 30-minute local news program, but after taking time for weather, sports and commercials, the news portion is more like 12 minutes. Most news stories average 20 seconds to 30 seconds, while a few might last a minute and a half.

During those 12 minutes or so, news anchors want to establish a rapport with viewers. They talk in conversational tones, including contractions and sentence fragments. Most of their sentences are short, so viewers will not become confused. They time the stories so that they will not run too long.

Most editors for broadcast have to learn a few style rules that differ from print and the Web. Here are some examples:

- Avoid abbreviations, unless the organization is well known, such as UN, US and FBI.
- Titles usually come before names. Example: Former Vice President Al Gore.
- Round off numbers and statistics. Example: \$3,956,789 would become “almost four million dollars.”
- Don’t use punctuation that will slow down or confuse the newscasters.
- Do use periods to signal pauses.
- Avoid direct quotations unless they are unique or you can tie them to a sound bite.
- Attribute the source before giving a quote. Say who said it and then what the person said.
- Keep it short and simple, including description. Usually the video can do an effective job of describing an event.
- Use phonetic spelling when needed and point that out to the person who will read it.
- Type copy in all caps or caps and lower case, depending upon the station’s style. Some newscasters say all-caps copy is easier to read.
- When possible, use present tense to make the news appear fresher.
- Type one story per page and have an ending mark, such as “###” or “-30-.”

Broadcast script sheets often are prepared with directions on the left side and a script on the right (see Box 4.6). On the left, you might see the anchor’s or reporter’s name with descriptions such as CU for close up, XCU for extreme close up, MS for medium shot, VO for voice over, or SOT for sound on tape. On the other side of the page is the script, typed either in all caps or in caps and lower case, depending on the station’s style.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Copy editors complete large tasks as they mold, refine and polish news copy. They fix flaws in copy before stories get into print.

Effectively organized stories save work for copy editors and other members of the news team. Although the inverted pyramid format has survived many years, it is only

one way to present news. Stories also can be organized using these formats: chronological order, personalized approach, feature approach, climactic arrangement, hourglass arrangement and parallel narratives.

Transitions are important in assuring a smooth flow in print and broadcast stories.

Copy editors work with multi-element stories. They use boxes, sidebars, lift-out quotes or other organizational devices. Also, they combine related accounts into roundup stories and condense long, related stories into briefs so readers can be informed about a wider range of topics.

Because public relations persons send messages to the news media hoping to enhance an organization's reputation, careful editing of the products is necessary.

Broadcast editors use many of the same skills as editors for print or the Web, and they must be aware of condensing stories and preparing them for people to hear or view.

These copy-editing principles apply whether journalists are preparing stories for newspapers, public relations, broadcast or the Internet.

For Further Reading

Ken Blake, *Inverted Pyramid Story Format*,
<<http://mtsu32.mtsu.edu:11178/171/pyramid.htm>>.

Bruce Garrison, *Professional Feature Writing* (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004).

Jill Treadwell and Donald Treadwell, *Public Relations Writing: Principles in Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008).