# Dealing with Attackese

*How do we approach tragedy-related language?*

BY ARTHUR PLOTNIK

In the aftermath of September 11, certain words and metaphors once valued for their forcefulness took on a diabolic complexion. Unless commenting on the tragedy itself, writers (or their editors) shied from language that conjured up the horrors of that day.

In text having nothing to do with the attacks, words like *burning* and *explosion* became taboo. Even the most benign metaphors, say, *castles in the air*, now seemed ominous. Television scriptwriters cut such lines as "My business just collapsed." Football announcers, for whom bellicosity is beauty, avoided *aerial attack, blitz, bomb*, and other terms of mass destruction.

As so often happens with language, words became broken glass (that image itself newly chilling). As reported in a *New York Times* piece ("In tragedy's wake, publicity people are getting hyper about hype," by Glenn Collins), one writer was excoriated by media clients for using this ill-timed metaphor in a press release:

> ...a disaster of sorts has also hit the technology sector, leaving dot-coms strewn about the business plain.

For Americans, September 11 put the terror back in the remotely irritating word *terrorism*. The administration came up with *homeland* and *security*—comfort language—for its new antiterrorism agency. The war against terrorism took the godly name "Infinite Justice"—until Islamic scholars suggested that God claims all rights in this department.

## The challenge for careful editors

"Nothing will be the same." So goes the litany heard daily after the attacks. Of course, nothing is *ever* the same. But September 11 changed fundamental perceptions, and it changed them overnight. It exploded the myth of a safe harbor. It threw freedom and security out of balance. It upended the rules and means of war. And in matters of language, it twisted hundreds of everyday words and figures of speech—metaphors—into new and baleful meanings.

As they trickle back into manuscripts, these loaded words will call for nimble judgments. How sensitive is the audience? How much time has passed? How crucial is the word in its context? Editors may want to soften language that triggers unbearable memories. But softening flirts with filtering, with compromise of meaning, with gratuitous cushioning of readers. "There is almost a new political correctness we have to worry about," observed a public relations executive. And

editors will indeed worry about it as they edit and write. Imagine readers facing a sentence like this (hypothetical) one:

> We can let ossified directors pilot the business until someone hijacks the market, or we can put fresh blood in the cockpit.

No one would call it political correctness to yank this insensitive imagery, at least while nerves remain

on edge. Terms like *hijack* may carry unwanted baggage for years to come. But what about sentences such as, "She's a terror on the court"? Or, "We'll take these students from ground zero to literacy"? Metaphors are the lifeblood of figurative expression. Should we start blacklisting whole categories of them—including those that give thrust to expression? (The very word *thrust* was among terms some feminists once listed as too aggressively masculine for use.)

As Sinclair Lewis said, "Every compulsion is put upon writers to become safe, polite, obedient, and sterile." Editors, too, know that compulsion, whether driven by readers, the organization, or their own frame of mind. But the last thing we need is another chilling effect on language.

We can respect a period of mourning. We can replace still-smoldering words that would distract from an intended message. But we cannot chip away at words and imagery and still describe the forces that shape human experience. "I am the mash'd fireman with breast-bone broken, / Tumbling walls buried me in their debris," Walt Whitman wrote some 150 years ago in "Song of Myself." Would we scumble those words for the next edition? Life gets rough. Language reflects life.

### Language reclaimed

Language is resilient—if we allow it to be. Our own resilience can be measured, in part, by our openness to expression. In time, some words called into service on that ghastly day will shed their heart-rending associations. *Tower* metaphors will soar

again, without their connotations of vulnerability. *Soot*—that mote of a word that came to signal hellish skies and ashen streets and offices—will return to its particulate self. Other sensitive words are already appearing in mundane contexts (italics mine):

> Shares in Exodus…*plunged* yesterday on bankruptcy fears and provided a display of how the dot-com *collapse* is still sending *tremors* through the telecommunications industry.

> …the sense in America that the economic *center is not holding* and is feeding the recessionary *fires*.

In the long run, each tragedy yields new language, new metaphors, not only for dealing with the next calamities, but for understanding our everyday lives in symbolic terms. Think of *Titanic, Maginot Line, kamikaze, meltdown.* One day, perhaps, even the words *Trade Towers* or *Pentagon* will figure in images that suggest the weight of the disasters but not their crushing sadness.

Meanwhile, the return of tragedy-related words to normal expression may be part of our healing, the catharsis that comes of bathing fear and misery in light. When we consign words to darkness, we give them voodoo-like power. We transform them into incantations of evil and fear. The perpetrators of unspeakable deeds, in their plunge to Hell, must not drag with them our power to speak—openly, courageously, and with the unbounded imagination that makes us human. ◆

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> *When we consign words to darkness, we give them voodoo-like power*

# The Use of Humor in Office Editing: Part 2

BY PETER D'EPIRO

Although it's tempting to apply the advice, "Don't get mad—get even," to your office edits, I don't recommend the subspecies of humor known as sarcasm. Save it for the freelancers. (Just kidding!)

What's too sarcastic? For a piece that's all buildup and no delivery, I'd resist quoting Horace's line, "Mountains are in labor—and out pops a ridiculous mouse." I'd also restrain myself from commenting, "This is very Shakespearean, as in 'a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury signifying nothing.'" Or Truman Capote's observation on Kerouak's *On the Road*: "This isn't writing, it's typing."

Don't ask writers whether they think Anne Lamott's advice in *Bird by Bird*—"Don't be afraid to write a really shitty first draft"—applies to the submitted version, too. Or "Aren't you afraid all these straw men will gang up on you some day?" In addition, you should never point out that some of their sentences (this example, too, from a contributor) work a lot better as haiku:

> The corner stone to
> arthritis is instruction
> when it's in the hands.

## Let's write like adults

I sometimes explain to writers that a particular linguistic usage is "falling into desuetude." I do it not just to be a smarty-boots but because *desuetude* itself, like thousands of other serviceable English words, is falling into desuetude in our throwaway culture, so I'm always finding excuses to send writers back to their bible—the dictionary.

That's why I may trot out the technical term *anacoluthon* to describe a lack of grammatical agreement between the first part of a sentence and its ending. Other guaranteed knee-slappers are words like *litotes*, *tmesis*, *zeugma*, *hysteron proteron*, *polysyndeton*, *chiasmus*, *aposiopesis*, and *hendiadys*. (Warning: Like Dave Barry, you will have to assure your colleagues that you are not making all this up, but they will nonetheless consider you a bona fide time traveler and will be very scared.)

My publication is directed at physicians, a highly educated audience, so I don't think we must grunt at them in Anglo-Saxon monosyllables. Some writers seem to be unaware of the Norman Conquest, when thousands of lush French-based words came into English, not to mention the Renaissance, when thousands more (especially pedantic "inkhorn terms") poured into the language directly from Latin, Greek, and Italian. So I spend my days dutifully changing *put in* to *insert*, *take out* to *extract*, *push out* to *extrude*, and *make out* to *decipher* (or *osculate*, as the case may be). Sometimes I'll remind the offender of Alexander Pope's illustrative verse: "And ten low words oft creep in one dull line."

I like to remind my colleagues of the advice the novelist Ford Madox Ford gave to aspiring writers: "Get a DICTIONARY and learn the meaning of words." Hart Crane would write poetry while listening to jazz and skimming the dictionary. Malcolm X (whose name I've heard pronounced as "Malcolm the Tenth") copied out the dictionary several times while in prison. Flaubert (who tapped out the

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## Taking the Language Back from Terror, When the Time Is Right

These are among the terms made sensitive by the September 11 attacks and their aftermath. Before that day, a communicator could use the words figuratively to animate any sort of topic. Now, because the terms might carry unwanted resonance, one has to think twice. For example, "Protesters hijacked the meeting and proclaimed a holy war against high-rises." Are such uses now out of bounds, casualties of the attacks? Or are they less likely to stir painful associations the sooner they are reclaimed for general use? As editors and publishers, we must make these decisions on behalf of our readers. And to the benefit or detriment of our publications' image. And of the language itself. [Note: This list is deliberately not in alphabetical order.]

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| attack | bodies | ground floor |
| airliner | falling | 90th [plus] floor |
| jetliner | leaping | epicenter |
| hijack | jumped | skyscraper |
| cockpit | plunged | high-rise |
| jet fuel | victims | skyline |
| bomb | survivors | Pentagon |
| weapon | evacuated | security |
| boxcutter | rescue | target |
| towers | burned | terrorist |
| twin | incendiary | extremist |
| rammed | fiery | militant |
| plowed | fire | conspirators |
| plummeted | fireball | cell |
| sliced | flames | suicide |
| shattered | billowed | jihad |
| crash | engulfed | holy war |
| collide | firefighters | martyr |
| collapsed | acrid | September |
| cascaded | smoke | horrific |
| imploded | soot | enormity |
| steel | ash | infamy |
| trusses | rubble | heinous |
| girders | debris | unthinkable |
| twisted | buried | unspeakable |
| concrete | remains | inexpressible |
| slab | ground zero | —AP |

# Editing for Nonprofit Advocacy

BY PAUL LAGASSE

Editor Carol L. Burnett's twin passions are education and women's rights. As director of publications for the American Association of University Women (AAUW), Burnett has ample opportunities to indulge both. Working for a national nonprofit organization is challenging and stressful, she admits, but offers many rewards. "You ought to enjoy your work," Burnett says. "After all, you spend half your life doing it."

The AAUW, founded in 1881, advocates on behalf of women and girls for gender equity and improved educational and career opportunities. The organization has three components:

- An association that supports outreach and educational campaigns;

- An educational foundation that offers grants and fellowships; and

- A legal advocacy fund that helps women suing against discrimination, harassment, and tenure denial.

AAUW has over 150,000 members in more than 1,500 branches. Communicating the association's broad mandate in a few well-chosen words is a challenge, says Burnett: "We don't have a tag line." She and her staff of eight designers and editors are responsible for all AAUW publications. Last year, that meant editing and producing more than 450 posters, brochures, periodicals, annual reports, and books. The staff also designs mugs, buttons, and T-shirts. All content, style, appearance, and color must be coordinated. "Each part of the organization has a slightly different message," says Burnett. "It's a pretty big challenge."

## Refereeing many views

Burnett's staff is large by the standards of Washington, DC, area nonprofits, but this reflects AAUW's size and

rhythms of the entire ending of *Madame Bovary* before he wrote it) relentlessly searched for *le mot juste*—the sole *perfect* word for any context.

I think all writers should be word mavens, reveling in language, sculpting with it, enticing, inveigling, and inveighing with it. I've urged writers to use words "the way you'd bite into a delicious sandwich." *Coruscate, obviate, scintillate, excoriate, emulate, eviscerate*—powerful verbs like these can light up a page. Why should writers, of all people, succumb to linguistic anorexia? I urge them to consider their development at an end only when they can boast with James Joyce, "I can do anything I want with words."

## Literary gibes aplenty

If your mind isn't particularly well stocked with literary or historical quotations and anecdotes, do not despair. You can collect scads of negatively illustrative materials from amateur advertisements, the "Black Eyes" section of this newsletter, your friends' children's homework—indeed, just about anywhere English is used. Politics is a superfertile source of fractured idioms. In a campaign pledge by a gubernatorial candidate from my state, I found this terse solecism: "If elected, motorists will drive on a toll-free Parkway." Though I'm sure he's right, the last thing New Jersey needs is 5.8 million governors. If it's an example of a non sequitur you're after, consider the campaign slogan of a candidate for president of my native borough: "One woman, one Bronx."

## Three drafts of a mawkish conclusion

1. Language, the quintessentially human activity, should be viewed with reverence and awe, but these emotions should not preclude us from using our individual *humanitas* to...scratch that.

2. We are all caught in the web of language, but an *entanglement* can also imply a *romance*, and this...ditto.

3. H. G. Wells once observed that "No passion in the world is equal to the passion to alter someone else's draft." If that's true—and I fully believe it is—we can at least render the ineluctable editing experience a bit less traumatic for all concerned by lacing it with some humor and our own personal touch. I urge my fellow editors to reach inside themselves for memorable anecdotes, well-turned phrases, luminous quotations, and other experiential and existential lore, humorous or otherwise, that can help strengthen camaraderie and make their editing comments affective as well as effective communications with their writing staff. As Samuel Beckett said, "That'll do in a pinch." ◆

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mission. "We are a service department," says Burnett. "People come to us with the big idea, and we help them implement it." Burnett believes that this interaction allows editors to assume a greater role in shaping programs than they might otherwise experience. "Something new and different is always going on," she notes, "but you might have six people looking at a brochure, all with slightly different views on what it should accomplish. We are the referees."

The quarterly magazine *Outlook*, AAUW's premier publication, is Burnett's favorite, although defining the magazine's mission is a constant struggle. Many in the association see *Outlook* as an internal organ focusing on existing programs. Others want broader coverage of issues of importance to women in general. Local chapters distribute the magazine to recruit new members, she notes, so the articles must attract and hold a reader's attention. "We're not selling a product," she says. "We're selling a vision."

Another challenge Burnett faces is the temptation to adopt cutting-edge technology that is not yet perfected. Direct-to-plate printing, for example, would allow the publisher to print straight from the client's electronic files to the aluminum printing plate. While this would save thousands of dollars in printing costs per issue, Burnett—an advocate of computers since the early 1980s—does not think the technology is ready. "We're a few years away from having it down."

## Preventing staff burnout

Burnett estimates that she has taught more than 100 college sections of copyediting, publications management, and journalism. She still teaches at George Washington University and at EEI Communications. "I always tell my students that there is no perfect job," she says, "and that, as an editor, the search for perfection can be carried too far." Students often balk at these two precepts, but Burnett finds them useful in combating the stresses of working in a nonprofit advocacy environment.

Burnett has experienced firsthand the effects of working long hours fueled primarily by passion and dedication, often for less money than the private sector offers. To keep her staff motivated, she encourages them to learn and purchase the latest desktop publishing hardware and software. The association also offers a flexible four-day work week. These steps reduce turnover and improve efficiency, says Burnett. The effort has paid off—it's been five years since anyone has left the department.

"Remember, we're not surgeons," Burnett often reminds her staff. "If we make a mistake, nobody dies." Sometimes, mistakes can even be turned into advantages. Burnett recalls the time a wayward **Z** appeared in the *Outlook* masthead as the middle initial of a brand-new executive director. "Some people hit the roof," says Burnett, "but no one wrote in and complained." At the department's introductory meeting with the new executive director, each editor and designer wore a name tag with the middle initial **Z**. After that, says Burnett, "I think we became her favorite department." ◆

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## Tips for Keeping Association Editors and Designers Happy

Association work can be stressful. Long hours and low salaries amplify normal workplace frustrations. Carol Burnett, director of publications at the American Association of University Women, shares techniques for keeping editorial staff satisfied and productive.

***Stay in touch***—Meet fellow association editors in classes and through Internet resources such as the DC Pubs listserv. Editors can rally support from colleagues in defense of an editorial position. For example, when faced with a request to make a change to a page layout that she believed would misrepresent the association, Burnett solicited the opinions of editors on the listserv. When she presented the results—all of which confirmed her stand—the request was quickly withdrawn.

***Encourage career development***—Association editors often undertake tasks that aren't part of the normal job description. They need the training and tools to be able to understand what designers and publishers do. Educational opportunities are perks that make people stay.

***Don't focus only on appearance***— "Sometimes we end up massaging the product so much that we forget its original purpose," says Burnett. "If people don't read it, then we've failed."

***Keep your perspective***—Encourage staff people to trust their judgment. One of Burnett's favorite axioms is "It's easier to ask for forgiveness than to ask for permission." If the customer doesn't like the results this time, try to do better next time. "Even if the computer says 'fatal error,' it's not," says Burnett. Is she lax about standards? "Just ask my staff," she says with pride.

# Who Should Pay for Changes?

BY JAYNE SUTTON

**Q:** Our firm's creative services department serves the entire organization, including our publications department. The publications group has a history of disputing the amount of AA charges, and we've been trying to decide when internal charges should be billed as an author alteration (AA) versus a printer error (PE).

Here's the most recent dispute. The publications group turned over a book project—text plus photos—to creative services for layout, with instructions that photos should not be duplicated in the publication. In their review of the page proofs, the publications staff found that a photo appeared more than once. Creative services revised the layouts and charged publications for the changes; publications objected.

Is there a general rule about what constitutes an AA, or is it always on a case-by-case basis? And how are AAs generally charged—by the occurrence or by how much it costs to make the changes?

**A:** The question of what constitutes an AA can be a contentious one, and it's worth clarifying in any organization that charges fees for creative and production services. As you can see from the dispute that has arisen in your organization, it's wise to have some ground rules in place and agreed on *before* there's a problem.

From your description, I can't see why there's any controversy in this particular case. The client (the publications group) gave clear instructions not to duplicate photos in the book, and those instructions weren't followed by the printer (creative services). Unless I'm missing something, this is clearly an error on the part of creative services—a PE—and the client is justified in disputing the AA charge.

But as you note, the broader issues of how the line is drawn between PEs and AAs and how charges are calculated need to be clarified to head off future misunderstandings.

## Defining 'alts' and errors

The trade customs of the typographic industry use these definitions:

- AAs (also called "alts") are additions or changes made by the customer to text, data, or style specifications originally submitted to the typographer.

- PEs are changes in galleys, composition, or other work made necessary as a result of errors by the typographer.

Those definitions give us a pretty straightforward guideline as to who's responsible for what. In the broader context of publication design and production—print or electronic—once text and illustrations have been agreed upon as final (all revisions and copyedits complete and approved),

*Look at your* **usual** *flow of work and define the point at which materials are handed over as 'final'*

the design direction and framework have been approved, and production has begun, any changes to the content or the design are considered alterations.

## The cost of making changes

In commercial settings, the cost of an alteration is generally based on the amount of work it takes to make the change. (As anyone who has done page layout knows, the addition of a word can be a minor insertion or a major operation that causes reflow of text over several pages.) As a project manager, I calculate a price for AAs and, to avoid any misunderstanding, notify my client before proceeding. Many designers and printers do not follow this practice; however, it is not unusual in the industry for printers to assume that clients know when they are in AA territory. If you are not sure, it's best to ask about charges at the time you request changes—or risk an unhappy surprise when the bill arrives.

In book publishing, it is common for an author to have a contract with the publisher that specifies that a certain number of alterations are allowed "free" at the page proof stage. This is generally a percentage (often 4 or 5 percent) of the total composition cost on the manuscript. (If an allowance of 5 percent is granted and the composition cost is $2,000, the publisher will absorb the first $100 of AAs, after which the author pays.)

Some publishers allow a certain number of alterations and set a unit cost for each AA above that number. (A set dollar amount per AA is more feasible in books that consist of straight running text than in more layout-intensive publications, where reflow can wreak havoc on page design.)

**Setting clear policy**

It is advantageous to establish clear and understandable guidelines for what constitutes an alteration—as well as a predetermined pricing structure.

A good strategy is to look at the *usual* flow of work in your publications projects and define the point at which materials that are handed over to the vendor—or service department—are considered "final." Then agree on that as the point past which changes mean AA charges. It also makes sense to define the kinds of changes that *won't* incur costs. For example, if the change is (strictly speaking) an AA but will not cause layout problems or take an inordinate amount of time to make, it's usually not worth the time or loss of goodwill to figure out a charge.

In the long run, the solution is to define terms, clarify the process, and come up with a plan for charges that is workable and fair for all concerned. Do it before the next big project, if you can. ◆

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# Country Abbreviations

Samantha Langley, editorial manager, Computer Sciences Corporations, writes: "I'm responsible for setting the corporate style for a company of 68,000 employees around the world. (Although, of course, probably only the six other editors in my publishing group really care what I decide.) I need a uniform style that is appropriate for a variety of audiences inside and outside the United States and that can be applied to a variety of media—everything from our corporate Web site, which has a worldwide audience, to small marketing brochures targeted at in-country companies. I've done a lot of research, and I'm flummoxed over how to handle the abbreviations for the *United States*, *United Kingdom*, and *European Union.*"

Here's her summary of the research:

1. *AP Stylebook*—it's vague. The entry under United States advises us to abbreviate this term as *U.S.*, with periods. The entries under United Kingdom and European Union make no mention of how the abbreviated forms should be handled. But, perversely, we are told specifically to abbreviate United Arab Emirates to *U.A.E.* and United Nations to *U.N.*

2. *New York Public Library Writer's Guide* and *The Editorial Eye*—disagree. *NYPL* calls for periods in both *U.S.* and *U.K.* However, the most recent issue of *The Editorial Eye* uses plain old *UK* with no periods.

3. *Chicago Manual of Style*—unequivocal, but trustworthy? Periods are called for in both U.S. and U.K. But then again, *Chicago* was most recently published in 1993.

4. British guides—for the *Times,* the *Guardian,* the *Economist*—all agree. The *Economist* uses *UK*, *US*, and *EU* without periods. The *Times* online guide (www.thetimes.co.uk) agrees, as does the *Guardian* online guide (www.guardian.co.uk/styleguide).

Langley says, "I could use *U.S.* with periods and *UK* without, but that looks inconsistent at best and careless at worst. I could insist on putting periods in both terms and just try to forget that the world outside the United States exists. Or I could drop all the periods and move to *US*, *UK*, and *EU*. This style certainly works for readers outside of the United States, but will it look incorrect to others?"

A certain amount of perceived inconsistency is bound to creep in when style decisions take into account more than one source of information. And that's perfectly natural: No single style guide has all the answers, all the time—especially not in 2001, when so much about editorial style is in transition. Increasingly, publishers are tending toward the least intrusive, cleanest-looking, and simplest to remember schemes of capitalization, punctuation, number style, and compounding possible. Even so, recent issues of the *Washington Post* contained *U.S.*, *UN*, and *EU.*

*Eye* editors decided in 1992 to use postal-style abbreviations for states. (*NYPL* reflects the consensus in 1995 and tends to be somewhat conservative; *AP*'s punctuation advice has always been spotty.) *US* is a logical extension. Our goal is having a logical rationale for making these sorts of calls; since so many of us are transitional in this regard, we recommend considering the country code list (and rationale) at http://helpdesk .rootsweb.com/help/abbrev1.html. A sensible worldview is a good thing to find.

—*LJ*

# Smoothing and Speeding the Journal Review Process

BY GARY MICHAEL SMITH

Journal peer review involves a fairly standardized process of manuscript receipt, reviewer selection, the review cycle, and decisionmaking about which drafts will be published, declined, or sent back for revisions. Although the peer review process is relatively simple in structure, it's important to make the best use of the time and expertise of editorial board members, reviewers, and authors. Often, editorial board members, like reviewers, are volunteering their time. Authors may be operating on strict grant deadlines that require publication of articles for additional funding; journal staff have an obligation not to allow submissions to languish—or worse, get lost in a shuffle of misdelivered express-mail packages, misdirected faxes, and expensive long-distance phone tag.

## Manuscript-tracking options

All journal editorial offices develop their own specific procedures, but the goal is to move manuscripts efficiently through the stages of an effective, unbiased review cycle while offering authors the quickest turnaround time possible for feedback, whether or not a paper is accepted. Electronic systems can ease the transition of the hard-copy and snail-mail editorial office into the speedier world of electronic submissions and reviewer comments.

Perhaps one of the most discussed topics among staff members of editorial offices is manuscript-tracking software. Which software to choose among the many available is a matter of personal preference, taking into account the nature, size, and scope of the journal. Start with an analysis of what the software will be used for and whether proprietary modifications are anticipated. What information needs to be tracked? How will the data be used by staff members? What display formats are preferred? Should a program be developed from scratch for a complex but long-standing editorial process? Should a current software package be modified? If so, which one?

If the journal is small and receives only a few dozen submissions monthly, or even yearly, a simple off-the-shelf system can be used. However, if the journal is larger and receives hundreds or thousands of submissions yearly, a program appropriate to such volume is necessary.

Commercially available tracking software developed for the specific needs of the peer-reviewed journal includes such industry-specific packages as RMTS (ScholarOne, Inc.), PaperLab (BJM Software), The Editorial Assistant (E.A. Software), and SwiftTrack (SwiftTech Software). These programs may or may not offer the options desired, but trial versions often are available at no charge and may be worth testing. If modification of the software is necessary, the provider may offer these services for a charge, and may even offer to convert files from an existing software package to the new one.

## Reviewer-database options

To avoid undue repetitiveness when selecting reviewers—especially since reviewers often work pro bono—larger offices often aspire to maintain a database with a number of appropriate candidates. If a database software package is appropriate for the journal, the system that works best for the office may be one developed for the specific needs of the particular environment. It is necessary to determine whether

- an available manuscript-tracking package will satisfy the need to organize the review process,
- a database program can be modified to serve as a tracking program for manuscripts, or
- a new database program should be developed separately from the tracking program.

A cursory review of database software will reveal a variety of packages such as Access (Microsoft Corp.), Paradox (Corel Corp.), and Oracle9i (Oracle), and database software descriptions can be seen on Web sites such as www.dosbin.com/dbase.htm.

A database program such as Paradox may provide seemingly limitless variables for manuscript and reviewer tracking, as well as template development and text and graphic report generation and presentation, but the programming code may not be easy to modify. If a programming consultant is required, a premium fee of from $80 to $100 an hour may be charged. If, however, the editorial office staff includes people familiar with or trainable in programming, a system with more user-friendly code, such as Access, may be the answer.

The capabilities and versatility of database software programs may seem comparable, but the final decision on which package to use should be based

on expectations of what the software will do, the ease of modifying it, and the cost (in time and money) of making such modifications in-house or by contracting out for services.

If a journal's budget and production schedule allow time for staff to evaluate specialized software, using a comprehensive manuscript-tracking software package may provide the most efficient and least labor-intensive system for handling the oversight of manuscripts as well as reviewers.

## The electronic submission and review process

Although the electronic check-in process varies from journal to journal, it generally consists of issuing the manuscript a number identifying it from all other submissions. For instance, if the year is 2002 and this is the 300th submission, the assigned number will be 02-300. The paper then is logged into a computerized system for tracking.

A dedicated, specialized manuscript-tracking system such as Carden Jennings Publishing's Gastro-central may be preferable for one journal, while another may benefit from combined word-processing and database software for general correspondence and the automated tracking of reviews, editorial decisions, and general status. See a review at www.gastro.org/news/ 99-11/manuscript9911.html.

Although manuscript-tracking or database software may accommodate the generation of letters and envelopes, a word-processing software package such as Microsoft Word or Corel WordPerfect may offer more flexibility when cutting and pasting various parts of form letters. Word-processing software may also be less cumbersome for generating complex forms and may provide easier links to fax numbers and e-mail addresses than database

software, although later versions of software such as those associated with current operating systems offer increasingly versatile options.

## Web privacy and e-mail issues

The integrity of posting research and critical reviews on the Web, once deemed at risk of potential breaches of confidentiality, is viewed by many journals and publishers as a nonissue. This general lack of concern is justified because of the availability of encryption software and the increasing swiftness with which articles are published. As a matter of fact, it's a growing practice to publish the entire texts of articles on a journal's or publisher's Web site, instead of offering only a table of contents and an abstract of articles.

However, a journal must remain sensitive to the potential lack of technology within research institutions. Consequently, although e-mail or Web posting may be the suggested or recommended method of communication and document transmission, do not make it a requirement for authors and reviewers.

Journal publishers that prefer to use Web posting to streamline their process and make it more convenient for authors may want to consider systems such as Cadmus' Rapid Review hosting service or Manuscript Central by ScholarOne. One such organization is the Institute of Food Technologists. See its guidelines at www.ift.org/ publications/jfs/sty-guid.shtml?L +mystore.

When sending reviewers their packets by e-mail, to avoid incompatibility journals should include clear instructions about software and format requirements for e-mailing reviews. E-mailed manuscript review correspondence can present a whole new set of potential pitfalls. Here are two:

- Reviewers must be warned not to send comments as an e-mail attachment unless they use the file format specified by the journal. If a review is not created as an e-mail but as a word-processing file such as Microsoft Word, the receiver will be able to open the attachment to the e-mail only if Word is loaded on the receiving machine. Newer software packages may address this compatibility problem, but not all recipients will have the latest hardware and software.

- Formatting can be lost or altered in e-mail transmission of a detailed layout such as that of a review form, with a confusing reconfiguration of the initial design the result. Although special software programs are available that offer electronic forms generation and transmission, reviewers using such forms must become familiar with the software and understand its limits and specific requirements. Each party will need to have compatible viewing software installed if the software is not universal.

Software doesn't make peer review completely automatic, by any means. In fact, implementing electronic steps may actually require you to rethink your entire editorial and review processes. But why not free up journal staff as much as possible from routine administrative work? In the long run, investing in what admittedly can be the time-consuming transition to using technology is an investment in human resources. ◆

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# The Iconoclast's Style Guide

BY PRISCILLA S. TAYLOR

Having just spent some time deducing the *Economist*'s style from scrutinizing the product [the *Eye*, October 2001], I ordered a copy of *The Economist Style Guide* on a whim. I could not have guessed what a hoot it would be to read—or how remarkably useful to own!

The subtitle, *A Concise Guide to All Your Business Communications*, doesn't quite fit if you work only in the American context, but, by George, the guide is concise, and it contains a host of information I wouldn't have expected to find in one place. Want to check out the name of the currency (and its symbol) for every country in the world? Convert fractions to their decimal equivalents? Refresh yourself on geological eras or on "scientific, economic, facetious and fatalistic laws in common use"? See rough conversions for measures of every imaginable type? Verify the members of organizations ranging from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to the dependencies of Australia or the franc zone? Verify the states, regions, provinces, or counties of countries from the ex-Soviet Union to Brazil? Compare the Jewish, Hindu, and Muslim calendars?* Learn the general rules for spelling Chinese, Dutch, French, German, or Russian names, and check the spellings of problematic personal names from the *Habsburgs* to *Daniel arap Moi* and place names from *The Hague* to *the Netherlands*? This is your book.

The guide is also a primer on good writing, proudly prescriptive and arbitrary. The tone is set from the beginning: "The first requirement of *The Economist* is that it should be readily understandable. Clarity of writing usually follows clarity of thought. So think what you want to say, then say it as simply as possible." After quoting George Orwell's elementary rules against using too-common figures of speech, foreign phrases, jargon, and the like, the guide gives its own rules for encouraging readers to keep reading:

1. "Do not be stuffy." Stuffiness, according to the guide, includes using the language of "spokesmen, lawyers, or bureaucrats" rather than conversational English. Hence: **"The army is accused of committing numer-ous human-rights abuses** probably means **The army is accused of torture and murder."**

2. "Do not be hectoring or arrogant. Those who disagree with you are not necessarily stupid or insane."

3. "Do not be too pleased with yourself." In other words, don't remind readers that you predicted something.

4. "Do not be too chatty." No **Surprise, Surprise.**

5. "Do not be too didactic." Starting too many sentences with imperatives such as **Note, Prepare for,** or **Remember**, the guide says, will make readers think they're reading a textbook (or a style book).

6. "Do not be sloppy in the construction of your sentences and paragraphs." Particularly avoid using a participle "unless you make clear what it applies to," as in **Proceeding along this line of thought, the cause of the train crash becomes clear.**

The guide also cautions editors to respect good writing and not edit out the variety that distinguishes the prose of the Nairobi correspondent from that of the Tokyo correspondent—lest readers come to feel that the entire publication is written in London. In arguing against the imposition of a single style, the guide quotes John Gross's comment: "Most of the damage [editors impose]…consists of small changes…that flatten a writer's style, slow down his argument, neutralize his irony; that ruin the rhythm of a sentence or the balance of a paragraph; that deaden the tone that makes the music."

Part I, called "The Essence of Style," lists its advice alphabetically. For example:

**Americanisms:** Use Americanisms discriminatingly. Many American words and expressions have passed into the language; others have vigour, particularly if used occasionally. Some are short and to the point (so prefer **lay off** to **make redundant**). But many are unnecessarily long (so use **and** not **additionally**, **car** not **automobile**, **company** not **corporation**, **transport** not **transportation**, **district** not **neighbourhood**, **oblige** not **obligate**…).

**Grow** a beard or a tomato but not a company.

Try not to verb nouns or to adjective them. So do not **access** files, **haemorrhage** red ink…, let one event **impact** another, **author** books (still less **co-author**

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*Curiously, among the "six important solar calendars" presented are two labeled *Gregorian*.

them), **critique** style sheets, **host** parties or **loan** money. **Gunned down** means **shot**.

Part II, "American and British English," is the most complete explanation of the differences that I have ever seen, encompassing transatlantic differences in meanings of some familiar words (e.g., *homely* in British English means *simple* or *informal*), in syntax and sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation. For example, the *Economist* tends toward hyphenated prefixes and quite different placement of quotation marks in relation to commas and periods. The British and Americans also have quite different names for foods and cooking equipment, seasons and plants, drugs, and professional titles.

The guide explains when to use *-ize* rather than *-ise* and contains a list of words it calls "generally acceptable in both British and American English," such as *bus* not *coach* and *neat* not *spruce* or *tidy*. The list, however, is not infallible; for example, it advises *phoney* not *phony*.

As for the usage notes, they are short and saucy:

**Countries and their inhabitants:** In most contexts, sacrifice precision to simplicity and use **Britain** rather than **Great Britain** or the **United Kingdom**, and **America** rather than the **United States of America…**

**Ireland** is simply **Ireland**. Although it is a republic, it is not the Republic of Ireland. Neither is it, in English, Eire.

**Flaunt** means **display**; **flout** means **disdain**. If you **flout** this distinction you will **flaunt** your ignorance.

**Gourmet** means **epicure**; **gourmand** means **greedy-guts**.

**Homosexual:** Since this word comes from the Greek word *homos* (same), not the Latin word *homo* (man), it applies as much to women as to men. It is therefore as daft to write **homosexuals and lesbians** as to write **people and women**.

**Hopefully:** By all means begin an article hopefully, but never write: **Hopefully, it will be finished by Wednesday.** Try: **With luck, if all goes well, it is hoped that…**

**Jargon:** Avoid it…. Avoid, above all, the kind of jargon that tries either to dignify nonsense with seriousness (**Working in an empowering environment**, a topic discussed at a recent *Economist* conference) or to obscure the truth (**We shall not launch the ground offensive until we have attrited the Republican Guard to the point when they no longer have an effective offensive capacity…**).

**Same:** Often superfluous. If your sentence contains **on the same day that**, try **on the day that**.

**Slang:** Do not use **the likes of**. And avoid words or expressions that are ugly or overused, such as **the bottom line**, **caring** (as an adjective), **carers**, **guesstimate** (use **guess**)…, **crisis**, **key**, **major** (unless something else nearby is minor), **massive** (as in **massive inflation**), **meaningful**, **perceptions**, and **prestigious**….

Of course, the most obvious differences between British and American usage show up in spellings, and the guide advises some notably peculiar—to an American reader—spellings in its "Common Problems" section, including *appal*, *caviare*, *cooly*, *hallo (not hello)*, *hotch-potch*, *pzazz*, and *storey*.

But the usage notes occasionally startle as well:

**Genitive:** Take care with the genitive. It is fine to say **a friend of Bill's**, just as you would say **a friend of mine**, so you can also say **a friend of Bill's and Hillary's**. But it is also fine to say **a friend of Bill**, or **a friend of Bill and Hillary**. What you must not say is **Bill and Hillary's friend**. If you wish to use that construction, you must say **Bill's and Hillary's friend**, which is cumbersome.

You bet. It is also the opposite of what American style guides recommend (i.e., *Bill and Hillary's friend*, assuming Bill and Hillary to be a unit).

In sum, if you work for an international company, this book will explain many of the intricacies of British versus American English. If you just like to see words used well, and to challenge your own style preferences, *The Economist Style Guide* is a fine addition to your reference shelf. But you have to keep alert. American writers or editors who take the following advice from the Introduction too literally might find themselves out of work:

Avoid, where possible, euphemisms and circumlocutions promoted by interest-groups. The **hearing-impaired** are simply **deaf**. It is no disrespect to the **disabled** sometimes to describe them as **crippled**. Female teenagers are **girls**, not **women**. The **under-privileged** may be **disadvantaged**, but are more likely just **poor**.

And **man** sometimes includes **woman**, just as **he** sometimes makes do for **she** as well.  ◆

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# Voice Misrecognition, Eskimos in Arctic Alaska, Breaking URLs

**Nicki Netter writes:** I just read the September issue of *The Editorial Eye*, and I was thrilled to see the Black Eye about the error introduced by voice recognition technology. I am unfamiliar with this technology, but I suspect it may explain some strange errors I encountered in a document I was editing recently. (I'm a medical copyeditor.) Some of the words I recall were *lipofelicity* (happy fat?), which presumably should have been *lipophilicity*, and *incite to* in a context in which *in situ* would have made sense. I had no idea what could have caused these errors. Thanks for the enlightenment!

**The *Eye* replies:** Your funny errors may have also been transcription errors. People who transcribe interviews, conference proceedings, etc., can only type what they hear—they don't have copy to go by. The ear gets it wrong if the transcriber is unfamiliar with the jargon used by speakers, as you've shown us!

**Donna Sullivan, MathWorks, writes:** I enjoyed the article on PC language but was surprised to read that the *New York Times* style manual says that *Eskimo* is the most recognizable term for the native people of Alaska and Canada. While it may be recognizable, it is also incorrect. As a regular visitor to Alaska, I can tell you that Eskimos are from the Arctic region of Alaska (and Canada and Greenland). They do not live in southern and central Alaska, the most populated parts of the state. In that region of Alaska the Tlingit, Athabascan, and other Indians have lived for centuries.

But no Eskimos. It's a small point perhaps but one that Alaskans take seriously.

**Jane Rea, EEI Communications' manager of editorial services, replies:** *NYT* editors made that call based on their research. The *Eye* recommends consulting more than one style guide or dictionary before deciding on matters of usage such as ethnic designations, which aren't clearcut and may change over time. Thanks for your insight.

**Linda Renshaw, managing editor, *South Carolina Wildlife* magazine, writes:** I thought I had a handle on treating Internet addresses that need to break: Do it after a punctuation mark. But page 10 (box) of the October 2001 issue of the *Eye* breaks www.compusense.net before the .net. Have I missed a new rule? As a publication with narrow columns in some of our departments, we encounter this possibility frequently. Would appreciate your advice. By the way, we also italicize Internet addresses, but that may just be our style preference.

**The *Eye* replies:** Yes, in our guidebook *E-What? A Guide to the Quirks of New Media Style & Usage*, we do recommend breaking the URL at the dot. I did worry about that dot becoming lost because readers are simply not conditioned to look for a period at the beginning of a line, but we decided that the trade-off was worth it to keep readers from thinking that the period at the end of a line completed the entire sentence. That would leave the rest of the URL stranded in the next line as a jarring surprise. Breaking before a period (or underline or other

mark) at least ensures that nobody will think that a URL, as well as a sentence, is completed when it is not. The eye may be discomfited, but it will travel forward to see what is going on and thus discover the rest of the address—and the true end of the sentence. Style decisions often require such trade-offs, with the winning decisions being the ones that cause less general angst. We don't recommend italics because they're harder to read and URLs are already a pain to read, but your style call is entirely legitimate. ◆

## Black Eyes

- From a trade magazine:

  Cheese is the perfect complement to a bottle of wine, a no-fuss hors d'oeuvre for guests, the best midnight snack.

  —Lori Gardner, associate editor, *Potentials* magazine, Minneapolis, MN

- Headline in a computer industry e-zine:

  Women Earning 76% of Men in Comparable Positions

- From an advertisement:

  Freelance CopyEditor/ Proofreader Assignment

  Association needs a freelancer copyeditor/ proofreder with at least 5 years of magazine experience.