

# Offpress

April 2008

Newsletter of the Society of Editors (Queensland) Inc. [www.editorsqld.com](http://www.editorsqld.com)

*John Sims notes: 'Never let a chance go by ...'*

I was sitting quietly in the lounge room, idly flicking the remote in the vain hope of finding something — anything! — worth watching on the cretiniser when, all of a sudden, Kevin's face materialised on the screen. You know Kevin, his face's been in all the papers since his rise to fame down in Canberra recently.

He was waving a pretty little gold-coloured book around in the air and rabbiting on about his government's *First 100 Days* in power. The Rudd Government, he called it. Funny, I always thought governments were supposed to take their name from the title of the party in temporary possession of the ballot box (a Labor government, or a Liberal government, or a Whatever government), not from the name of the individual running the show for the moment. Silly me!

Anyway, a fast search for the print version of this remarkable bit of self-aggrandisement soon revealed that it would be useless trying to nail a copy down; the few printed ones seemed to be as scarce as hens' teeth and reserved for the privileged. 'Download it,' I was told.

So, I did — about 40 pages of waffle in the usual true politician-speak.

Now, having been a proofreader since the 1950s (remember them?), it's hard (some might even say impossible!) for a proofie like me to let a chance slip by without a sly peek at the contents of anything to do with the printed word. Bus tickets, jam tin labels, shop blackboards, matchbox covers, restaurant menus ... you name it, I read it.

I can boast a few years in my career in this racket doing the government stroke; I learnt early on that gummint departments are supposed to follow what used to be called, for short, the AGPS as their writing guide. I had endless snarl sessions with assorted writers and editors about the reason why, and the necessity for, gummint writing — local, state or federal — to follow the directives laid down therein.

Enforcing that style made me a lot more bad friends than good friends — to the point where, in the end, I simply gave up. Somebody once said, 'If you have to beat your head against a wall, at least find a wall you like'. If the writers decided to ignore the recommendations in the AGPS, then who was I, a lowly AO3 proofie, to argue the toss against the serried ranks of AO5s and AO6s facing me like Caesar's legions?

Those of you who've had some dealings with the gummint pecking order will know that an AO3 is ranked just marginally higher than the bloke who cleans the dunnies. Gets about the same wage too. The AO3 is ignored in a lot of cases if a difference of opinion arises, especially when the one doing the arguing against him wields a lot more power with the pay office.

I'll give you two simple illustrations of this. One: in the print game, it's the rule (well, it used to be, anyway, before desktopping arrived

on the scene) that a single space follows a punctuation mark. It's been set down in the AGPS since the bears were bad and the Snooks revision (the latest AGPS), still fighting the good fight on page 117, states that this is the way to go. Two: it says in the AGPS that the word 'government' takes a cap G when it's part of a formal title, but is lower-cased elsewhere (the Queensland Government did this; government policy on that). See page 124.

Yair? Point out those two to whoever produced the *First 100 Days*.

*continues on page 4*

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# Indigenous literacy — how can we help?

## Report: Wendy Abernethy

It was like a reunion for many members when longstanding member Marilyn Naylor returned to speak at our April meeting.

Marilyn, from Riverbend Books in Bulimba, spoke to us about the Indigenous Literacy Project. An initiative of Riverbend Books, and in particular Ms Suzy Wilson, the Indigenous Literacy Project is a partnership between the Australian book industry and The Fred Hollows Foundation. The project aims to raise awareness and money to help resolve the current crisis in literacy in remote Indigenous communities. All funds raised are used to purchase books and literary resources, which go to the Fred Hollows Foundation to be directly distributed to these communities in need.



There is an enormous gap in literacy standards between non-Indigenous and Indigenous children. The gap increases for children from remote Indigenous communities. Recent figures show that on average:

- only 1 in 5 children from remote Indigenous communities can read to an accepted minimum standard
- by Year 7 only 15% of children from these communities achieve that benchmark.

In order to address this problem, the Indigenous Literacy Project began in 2004 and involved 112 schools where children paid \$5 to read 10 books — at least seven from specially prepared, age appropriate booklists. In return for their donation and efforts the children received a certificate signed by Ian Thorpe. That year they raised \$25 000.

In 2005 adults jumped on the bandwagon along with more schools and \$37 000 was raised. By 2006 it was a nation-wide event involving over 14 000 participants — including schools, libraries, booksellers, publishers and individuals — and raised \$80 000.

Last year, much to the delight, and beyond the expectations of those involved, the inaugural Indigenous Literacy Day (September 5) raised \$250 000. This included publishers donating a percentage of their takings from titles invoiced that day, and booksellers donating a portion of their takings for that day. The New South Wales Bar Association donated a substantial \$65 000. Schools and businesses held special events to help.

So, we heard the horrid statistics. We heard messages of support from the 2008 ambassadors, Therese Rein, David Malouf, Tara June Winch, Andy Griffiths and Geraldine Brooks. We saw delightful photos of excited children receiving their packages of books. We want to help.

*What can we do?*

Marilyn, herself a great ambassador for the project, was most forthcoming with ideas on how individuals, schools and businesses could help.

Here are some ways that individuals can participate:

1. Participate in the 2008 Readers' Quest sharing our common love of books and reading while raising money to support Indigenous literacy. The Readers' Quest is a terrific idea for book clubs. More information is available on the website.
2. On Indigenous Literacy Day purchase a book at a participating bookshop.
3. On Indigenous Literacy Day organise a gold coin donation at your workplace.

Indigenous Literacy Day 2008 will be September 3. They aim to better \$250 000. Let's do our bit to help them!

Please visit <[www.worldwithoutbooks.org](http://www.worldwithoutbooks.org)> for more details.

*Footnote:* Suzy Wilson has offered to donate a 'bundle of books' for us to raffle in aid of the ILP at our AGM, which just happens to fall on Indigenous Literacy Day — Wednesday, 3 September — isn't that excellent!

# Copy editing and proofreading workshop

**When? Saturday, 17 May 2008, 9.00 am to 5.00 pm**

**Where? Brisbane Girls Grammar School,  
Gregory Terrace**

**How much? \$180 members; \$230 non-members  
(lunch included)**

**Closing date: Saturday, 9 May 2008**

This workshop has been developed for editors who want to gain or refresh copy editing and proofreading skills in a supportive group environment. As a participant you will benefit by:

- further developing your editorial judgement
- learning or practising standard editing and proofreading mark-up symbols
- developing confidence in your existing skills
- discovering which areas need further development
- appreciating the variety of good solutions which may be applicable in editing
- networking — actually getting to know your peers' work.

**Who will benefit?** This workshop will be of particular value to editors who work in isolation. However, because each session will require individual work on a short piece, followed by group review and discussion, everyone can benefit. This format caters for a variety of working speeds and levels of experience.

## **Presenter: Helena Bond**

Helena has been editing since 1990 and is a popular trainer for both the Society of Editors and the Queensland Writers Centre. Her editing experience is varied (wide range of non-fiction plus some fiction); she also sings, cycles and has a strong interest in personal development. For more information see [www.HelenaBond.com](http://www.HelenaBond.com).

## **Workshop outline**

### *Session 1*

- What to look for
- How to mark it up
- Edit a short piece

### *Session 2*

- Group discussion on issues arising and comparison of mark-ups and approaches
- Proofread a short piece

### *Session 3*

- Group discussion on issues arising and comparison of mark-ups and approaches
- Proofread the whole-of-work elements for the same work used earlier for the short proof exercise

### *Session 4*

- Finding what's missing
- Vital non-mark-up issues

**Email [training@editorsqld.com](mailto:training@editorsqld.com) for more information.**

## *Life members \**

Barbara Ker Wilson (2002)  
Jan Whelan (2000)  
Mary-Jane Bosch (2000)  
John Collins (1993)  
Laurie Muller (1993)

\* year of award in brackets

## May meeting

The speaker at our May meeting will be Pam Koger. Pam is a graphic designer, PowerPoint wizard and trainer *extraordinaire* at Queensland University of Technology. Pam does ... and ...; a comprehensive workload!

She also has a life outside of work that sees her indulging in ..., making her a well-rounded individual indeed.

Pam's wide experience and chatty delivery style should generate interesting observations and maybe some challenges about ... and ... — and that's just a few thought starters. There will be more ...

We challenge you to come along on 7 May and get those blanks filled in — see you at the meeting!

## *Web wanderings*

***Need more 'wow' in your images? Check out large scale panoramic image creation at:***

<http://www.xrez.com>

***Following the global banking problem? Keep an eye on things here:***

<http://bankimplode.com>

***Time travel news — get it here!***

<http://www.johntitor.com>

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*FYI:* This month it's mostly Century Schoolbook regular 11pt on 11.5pt leading, with smatterings of Verdana, 10pt on 11pt.

*Note:* Copy deadline for the May 2008 issue of *Offshoot* is Wednesday, 14 May 2008.

✍ 'Never let a chance go by ...' continued from page 1

I don't know how much input Kevvie had for this job (precious little, I'll warrant), but I'm sure his writers were not told to follow the gummint writing bible. If they were, why didn't they? If they weren't, why weren't they?

So, anyway, I did a decent sort of a proofreading job on Kevin's magnum opus and wandered up to his electorate office, just up the road from our joint, with his 40-odd pages under my arm. I wasn't exactly dolled up to the nines ... just stubbies, thongs and a t-shirt. When I waltzed in the door, I must have set off a silent alarm in the back rooms somewhere, because this sheila came racing out to the front office all concerned like at my deshabelle appearance and blurted out, 'Whattaya want?'

When I introduced myself and explained my mission to her (taking the goodies out of the envelope so she could maybe understand what I was on about and letting her get a good eyeful of the plethora of red rings in the text), I asked her whether it'd be okay to leave the envelope unaddressed and if Kevvie would get it. She kinda looked down her nose at my not-too-subtle suggestion that the thing, riddled as it was with mistakes, wouldn't look too good on his CV.

'Yair,' she said, looking at me like I'd walked in a barker's nest and brought most of it into the office on my thongs, and toddled off somewhere into the back. Just before I left, I said, 'I hope to hear from him'.

I guess even the lowliest office sheila must get certain frissons of delight breathing in the same air as the PM.

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## Freelance Register delays

Please accept the Management Committee's apologies for the delays in producing the new Freelance Register.

Unavoidable delays occurred last year because of unforeseen events that meant key committee members were unable to work on the Register according to schedule.

However, the text was sent to the typesetter some time ago. We understand that the typesetter has yet to complete his work and return it to us; we are following up with him to obtain the typeset text asap. We will let you know as soon as we receive further information.

## Slang corner

**Your other eye!** *excl.* [20C] (Irish) an excl. of disbelief, rubbish! nonsense!

**Very like a whale in a teacup** *phr.* [mid 19C] utterly impossible, totally absurd [note *Hamlet* (1601) III:ii, where Shakespeare uses a truncated version very like a whale]

**Rushing business** *n.* [late 19C] (Und.) robbery through confidence tricks and hoaxes

*Source:*

Green, J. (1999). *Cassell dictionary of Australian slang*. London: Cassell.

# Next BELS examination

The Board of Editors in the Life Sciences in the United States has an accreditation process for life science editors, centred on a 3-hour written examination.

The next Australian examination will be held in Sydney on Saturday, 5 July 2008. The aims of certification are:

- To provide qualified manuscript editors in the life sciences a way to demonstrate their editorial proficiency.
- To provide employers and clients of manuscript editors in the life sciences a way to identify proficient editors.
- To establish a standard of proficiency for editing in the life sciences.

Currently, there are several hundred certified members worldwide, but the number is growing rapidly as this qualification becomes better known.

## Eligibility and registration

To be eligible for the certification exam, you must have a bachelor's degree and at least two years of experience as a manuscript editor in the life sciences. Some substitution of education and experience are allowed.

You don't need to have an academic background in science, although you do need experience in editing scientific material. Many general editors have taken the exam and passed it.

If you want to take the examination, you must apply for eligibility well in advance. First, you submit an academic transcript, your CV and three letters attesting to your editing experience to the Board. When this has been accepted, your eligibility lasts for three years, during which time you may apply for any of the scheduled examinations.

All correspondence is with the BELS registrar in the United States; this means that you must allow time for sending documents by post.

## Australian examination

The examination will be on Saturday, 5 July 2008, 9.30 am to 12.30 pm, at the Mechanics' School of Arts, 280 Pitt Street, Sydney. The closing date for registering for the examination is 14 June.

## Costs

Establishing eligibility costs US\$25; registering for the examination costs US\$100.

## Further information

Information is available at [www.bels.org](http://www.bels.org) or contact Rhana Pike, [rhana@australianeditor.com](mailto:rhana@australianeditor.com).

## Vale Pat Ryan OAM

*First met Pat Ryan in his capacity as a coach for my son's cross-country team. For five years, I enjoyed Pat's delightful company at most training and event days and also knew him through his involvement with music at Churchie. A few years later I was thrilled to meet him again when I joined the ranks of the Society of Editors.*

Pat was, in every sense of the word, a thorough gentleman. He was educated, genuinely warm, unfailingly courteous and carried an aura of wisdom rarely seen these days. He had a great sense of humour and was an inspiration to his colleagues and friends – and all that without the slightest touch of hubris or pretension.

Pat was a career English teacher and taught at Churchie from 1969 till he retired in 2002. He was awarded a well-deserved OAM in 1999 for his services to the Australian College of Music.

Sadly, Pat passed away in March aged 73 ... *oh, when will we see his like again?*

Goodbye, old friend.

*Karl Craig*

# PEEPS!

(Episode 8)

A few months down the track from the night bowling outing, the PEEPS! team were getting around to thinking seriously about the second promo event. What to do, what to do? A committee meeting was convened in a new venue above a feng shui parlour.

'Come on people, let's put all of our ideas on the table'. Rodg was bustling because he felt out of sorts (his chi probably wasn't aligned).

Shirley led off: 'I feel the bowling was a little too "out there" and we need to follow that up with something a little less physical — a PE high tea at the library from me!'

Ellie: 'That's a lovely idea!'

John: 'I think it needs to be a web competition of some sort.'

Anita: 'We need to lobby the education bods to get PE change happening — there are conferences we can target with papers, posters and stalls.'

Toby: 'Let's combine John and Anita's ideas and have conference competitions!'

Sophie: 'Let's funk things up with a cocktail party; we could still do the high tea, auntie, but we need something alcoholic to balance things out. We could put pithy PE tokens in the bottom of the martini glasses so that people could drink and think at the same time!'

There was plenty of chatter after the ideas were revealed; Rodg sat back, watching, listening. Then: 'Let's do it all; we'll give ourselves ulcers, but let's not faff about with single events. This is about sustained campaigning — this is PE war, people!'

**Next time:** Okay!

## *Getting the message across: 4th IPEd National Editors Conference*

*Adelaide, 8–10 October 2009*

The Society of Editors (SA) will host the 4th National Editors Conference in Adelaide in 2009.

The conference will be held at the Adelaide Festival Centre, which looks out over the picturesque River Torrens, a tranquil stretch of water in the heart of the city. The seminar spaces are well placed, with Lyrics Lounge in particular offering impressive views over Elder Park and the river.

The Festival Centre is one of Australia's most active theatrical producers presenting critically acclaimed theatre, music and dance programs as well as art exhibitions and a host of community events including art, craft and food markets. Never afraid to work at the leading edge of arts, the Centre serves the diverse tastes of the community.

Through the provision of well designed facilities as well as dynamic and progressive programming, the Centre is firmly placed at the heart of the arts.

The Adelaide Festival Centre is strolling distance from the arts and cultural facilities located along North Terrace including the Art Gallery of South Australia, the South Australian Museum, the Migration Museum, the War Memorial, Parliament House, the State Library and Elder Conservatorium.

Good food and wine are never far away in Adelaide. There are numerous cafes, wine bars, tapas joints and restaurants to choose from in the Central Market precinct, Hindley Street and Rundle Street in the city, as well as Melbourne Street and O'Connell Street in North Adelaide.

In the coming months, additional information for conference delegates will be available through regular newsletter updates and on the conference website:

<http://www.editors-sa.org.au/conference09.html>

Or on the IPEd website:

<http://www.iped-editors.org/content/conferences>

So start planning your trip to Adelaide, where you can enjoy the fabulous architecture and culture as well as listen, discuss, learn, edit, eat and drink.

### ***Conference essentials***

**Where:** Adelaide, South Australia

**When:** 8–10 October 2009

**Venue:** Adelaide Festival Centre

**Further information:**

[SAPresident@editors-sa.org.au](mailto:SAPresident@editors-sa.org.au)

<http://www.editors-sa.org.au/conference09.html>

## Effective onscreen editing: a book review

*Effective onscreen editing* is the work of Geoff Hart, a Canadian editor and scientific communicator with more than 20 years experience. I reviewed a pdf version; a print version is available from Lulu.com.

The first thing that struck me on opening the pdf was the layout. The pages of the pdf are in landscape format, with two columns of text on a page to produce the effect of a double-page format. The design is minimalist, and the optimisation for onscreen reading is obvious and delightful.

The second thing that struck me was the size of the book. The extent in this format is 743 pages (731 + xii); the word count is 150 000 or more. Clearly there's an awful lot to read here.

Hart explains in his acknowledgements that the book is based on his column on onscreen editing for *Intercom* magazine. He takes us from a conceptual overview of the pros and cons of onscreen editing right through to managerial advice on how to implement onscreen editing in the workplace. He has clearly done a lot of work in

expanding from this base and combining his articles into a single cohesive text, but the episodic nature of his original material remains apparent in the extensive, almost exhaustive coverage. I think some of this material, such as the section on how to calculate pay rates, for example, could have been cut without impairing the book as a whole.

Some opportunities were also missed in the design and organisation of the text. The introductory chapter refers to four sections plus the introductory material; however, only two of these sections and the introductory material have section opening pages. Section headers do not appear in the table of contents or on headers within the chapters. Given the length of the book, I feel that some additional navigational support would have been useful.

Of course, the fact that this is an ebook (or, if you prefer, e-book) means that other kinds of navigation are available. The reader can click on entries in the table of contents and the index to go straight to the relevant page, or they can use word searches and electronic bookmarks.

Most of the text focuses on using Microsoft Word. However, Hart regularly points out differences between different releases of Word and provides frequent advice for Macintosh users.

Also, his approach throughout is to start from basic principles — for example, when discussing notes and comments, he talks about what they are for and when they are useful before he looks at how to use them in particular programs. This will make the text useful for any editor, even those working with the most obscure independent word-processing software.

Working from principles doesn't mean that Hart skimps on practice. He offers an abundance of specific and detailed tips on how to optimise computers, software and work procedures for editorial efficiency. His approach is aided by his relaxed, free-flowing writing style.

I wholeheartedly recommend this title to any editors who work onscreen — which nowadays is just about all of us.

[Many thanks to Tim Bugler for this thorough review. Ed.]

## Frisson of the new: a multi-part exploration of new words

From ABC Radio's *Lingua Franca*, an abridged version of the transcript of an interview with Ruth Wajnryb, applied linguist, newspaper columnist and writer (early February 2008); reproduced in *Offpress* across several issue during 2008 (because it's quite long. Ed).

People love new words. They get a kick out of hearing them spoken, or seeing them in print. They're charmed by the piquancy, the over-the-topness, the in-your-face newness.

There's no question that new words have an attractiveness. Sometimes, what's captivating is the irony — like 'orthorexia nervosa', which is the eating disorder of those tyrannised by their own obsessively healthy eating habits.

Often, a new coinage labels a phenomenon that's been around for a while, previously slipping and sliding namelessly along the ocean-bottom of the language. The new term provides the shorthand, and when you discover it, you seize on it, almost with gratitude.

Such is the case of 'man flu', a new term for a minor cold experienced un-stoically by a male. I've found women generally very pleased that this phenomenon has now been given a label.

These very new words for a newly-named old phenomenon take up residence in our minds, as Susan Butler of *Macquarie Dictionary* puts it, with the status of an old friend.

[to be continued ...]

# President's report: Robin Bennett

## Institute of Professional Editors Limited

The IPEd Council met in Canberra on 12–13 April.

The Council appointed its first Executive: Virginia Wilton, Canberra, as Chair, Ed Highley, Canberra, as Interim Secretary, and Janice Bird, Tasmania, as Hon. Treasurer.

The Council discussed in detail a formal structure for IPEd's main entities (the Council, the working groups, the Accreditation Board and the Assessors Forum).

Individual councillors were assigned responsibility for specific aspects of Council activities, as follows: the Executive, budget, finance and risk management; Rosemary Luke, SA, website, communication and PR; Robin Bennett, Standards; Rosemary Noble, Vic, policy development, email etiquette, meeting costs, new members, relationship with committees; Michael Lewis, NSW, ethics; Anne Surma, WA, professional development (with a contribution from Robin Bennett on mentoring). Standards will now be the responsibility of the Accreditation Board.

The Council has sought payment of a levy amounting to \$20 per member from all societies for 2008–2009.

Councillors will meet again in Adelaide on at the end of May to develop a strategic plan for IPEd's operations and to refine the business plan that is being developed for the Accreditation Board.

This meeting was an impressive start to the new Council's operations, with its emphasis on good strategic and business planning.

## Accreditation Board

The Council spent many hours discussing the board's plans for the first exam; they take the view that accreditation should be a cost-neutral program. A business plan for the Board has been developed. Work on that plan continues.

Councillors concluded with regret that the first exam should be deferred until later in 2008 [*see separate note this page*].

The AB has since held two teleconferences, to consider the business plan and the work of the exam development team. That team consists of Lead Writer (Meryl Potter, NSW) and three reviewers (Stephanie Holt, Vic, Shelley Kenigsberg, NSW, and Janet Salisbury, Canberra). Alan Ernst, a SocEdsQ member, has been appointed as Exam Coordinator.

## Mentoring program

The committee of the CAL Cultural Fund has approved the payment of \$39 510 for a mentoring program to be run by SocEdsQ over a two-year period, in partnership with the Queensland Writers Centre. The aims of this project are:

- help mentees establish careers as editors
- provide a service to members of the QWC whose manuscripts are selected for a 'taster' edit by the five mentoring teams
- establish mentoring as a normal and desirable activity for very experienced editors
- develop a model or models of mentoring that can be used or adapted by other societies.

The committee is currently revising aspects of the program. A more detailed

statement will be circulated to all society members as soon as these details have been confirmed.

This is an exciting project, the first of its kind ever undertaken by an Australian society of editors. It will give beginning editors or those wishing to gain experience in other areas a distillation of the knowledge and years of experience of skilled senior editors.

## Postponement of accreditation exam

The Accreditation Board wishes to advise all members that the first exam is to be rescheduled for October or November 2008, on the recommendation of the IPEd Council.

It is essential that the accreditation program be based on sound business planning and strategic planning relating to all IPEd activities. The Council and the Board are working hard to ensure that the accreditation scheme is established on a sound financial and operational footing.

The Council also feels that it is important to promote the exam vigorously, and that the original timetable did not allow sufficient time to do this. The new date will give members who plan to sit the exam more time to prepare and to take advantage of a revised sample exam, to be made available on the IPEd website. This sample exam will reflect far more accurately what the real exam is likely to contain.

These issues will be discussed at the next Council meeting (31 May – 1 June). You will be informed of the date and other details relating to the exam as soon as possible.

*We thank you for your patience.*

## IPEd notes: news from the Institute of Professional Editors

*April 2008*

The indefatigable secretary of the IPEd Council, Ed Highley, has managed to reconcile all the councillors' work schedules, travel plans and family commitments in order to convene a face-to-face meeting in Canberra over the weekend of 12–13 April. This is the handover meeting at which the Interim Council transforms itself into the Council that governs IPEd as a company limited by guarantee. Thanks are due to Virginia Wilton who has offered the premises of her company, Wilton Hanford Hanover, free of charge as the venue for the meeting. Important items on the agenda include the appointment of an honorary treasurer, a position description for a paid, part-time secretary and the approval of the budget. The council will also set the levy to be paid by the state and territory societies to the national body.

The Accreditation Board is making great progress; they are currently assessing applications for the jobs of developing and coordinating the exam and will be announcing the appointments after their meeting on 7 April. Investigations are continuing into the logistics and costs of conducting the exam on screen or online, but the first exam will be on paper, held simultaneously in all state capitals and Canberra. More details are in the preliminary notification which is on the IPEd web site under Accreditation.

Many tasks have to be completed to ensure that the inaugural exam runs smoothly. The Accreditation Board is working on application forms and guidelines for candidates; guidelines for examiners, invigilators and markers; measures to preserve the security and confidentiality of exam papers; and promotion and publicity. A major area is liaison with the societies of editors, which will be encouraged to hold training sessions before the exam and will provide venues and invigilators on the day.

*Janet Mackenzie*  
*Liaison Officer*



### Successful science writing and editing

Biotext will run this popular training course twice in Brisbane, on Thursday, 19 June and Wednesday, 15 October 2008 at the Stamford Plaza.

The one-day course is aimed at anyone who writes or edits material dealing with science and technology, for any audience. It covers:

- science writing and editing
- science copyediting.

Biotext can also provide training at your workplace, tailored to meet the specific needs of your organisation.

The training section of the Biotext website (see 'Services offered' at [www.biotext.com.au](http://www.biotext.com.au)) has a link to a detailed outline of the course.

For further information, contact Vesna Ratajkoska:

(02 6282 2007 or [admin@biotext.com.au](mailto:admin@biotext.com.au)).

### *Quotable quotes*

Adepts in the speaking trade  
Keep a cough by them ready made.

*Charles Churchill (1731–64)*  
*British poet*

Discovery consists of seeing  
what everybody has seen  
and thinking what nobody has thought.

*Albert von Szent-Györgyi*  
*(1893–1986) Hungarian-born*  
*US biochemist*

The future is made of the  
same stuff as the present.

*Simone Weil (1909–43)*  
*French philosopher*

Events in the past may  
roughly be divided into  
those which probably never  
happened and those which  
do not matter.

*Dean Inge (1860–1954)*  
*British churchman*

# FORENSIC EDITING: THE PEN (OR KEYBOARD) REALLY IS MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD



*The following article was first published in the June 2007 issue of WA SocEds' Bookworm newsletter; reproduced here with kind permission of the author and the speakers.*

A few meetings ago, two of our members mentioned in passing that they were 'forensic editors', and while the conversation moved on, the title lingered for some of our committee. Just what is a forensic editor, we wondered.

Despite what *CSI* would have you believe, 'forensic' doesn't mean doing everything by torchlight. Forensic editing simply means applying investigative editing and legal analytical skills to documents relating to, or used in, courts or forming part of public legal record.

Tatum Hands and Danielle Davies specialise in forensic and legal editing, and as they explained to our May meeting's audience, technological advances have made their role a necessary step in our legal and governmental systems.

The rise of desktop publishing has led to an accelerated publishing schedule for all types of documents. Traditionally, documents would have to go through several stages, from writing to

typing to printing to delivery, passing through the hands, and under the watchful eyes, of several specialists along the way.

In comparison, today anything can go from conception to global distribution in a matter of hours. In addition, there is an implicit assumption that highly qualified fields such as the law are practised by people who can write well; we assume that because someone holds an influential role, they must be able to articulate their knowledge in a logical, well thought-out manner. However, contemporary legal studies do not prepare lawyers and judges for extensive writing tasks in an area where even the smallest punctuation or grammatical error can sometimes change the meaning of a whole piece and undermine the legal authority of the document.

This means that forensic editing is arguably one of the most responsibility-laden fields of editing. There is a need to hold a substantial amount of English and editorial skills alongside

legal knowledge, as well as a clear prerogative to maintain the intentions and integrity of all documents. Sound exhausting?

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## Your news and views

We welcome any contributions to our monthly newsletter. Copy deadline is one week after the general meeting. Please send articles, letters, book reviews, details of interesting web sites, anecdotes, snippets and quotes to the editor at [offpress@editorsqld.com](mailto:offpress@editorsqld.com).

When you take into account the rates charged by professional consultants, it's surprising to learn that forensic editors have got to keep a sharp eye out for plagiarism too. Every reference and footnote needs to be checked and checked again, as there have been messy instances where up to 60% of a document has been 'borrowed' from somewhere else ... and alarmingly, some writers didn't even know that this was an issue!

But then there is a silver lining. A collective sigh of wistful envy rose from the audience as Tatum explained about a contractual clause that explicitly expresses her right to be 'intrusive'. Yes, she has the contractual right to be as ruthless with her red pen as she wants to be.

*Emma Pearmain*

## Membership information

The Society of Editors (Queensland) Inc. came into being in 1990 with the object of promoting the exchange of ideas and the dissemination of information on matters of professional interest in the publishing industry, and to help in establishing and maintaining high standards of editing and publishing. Since that time, the Society has grown from a gleam in the collective eye of a few editors to a professional association of some standing. It has been involved in the development of the Diploma of Editing (Publishing) at TAFE, and the former Graduate Diploma of Publishing and Editing at Griffith University.

The Society holds training workshops and seminars for its members, and is responsible for producing the Register of Freelance Publishing Services (updated every few years, and containing entries for editors, designers, illustrators, layout experts and so on).

There are three levels of membership:

- Full membership: open only to people professionally engaged in editing and publishing; the membership

application must contain details of the applicant's experience and the names of publishing companies and organisations worked for. Annual fee: \$45

- Associate membership: open to anyone interested in the activities of the Society; there are no voting rights, and associate members are not eligible for election to Management Committee positions. Annual fee: \$35
- Student membership: open only to full-time students who cite their student ID number; there are no voting rights, and student members are not eligible for election to Management Committee positions. Annual fee: \$20

People who live more than 50 km from the Brisbane GPO pay half-fees. Application for membership is assessed by the Management Committee.

Visit the website or contact the Membership Secretary for an application form.

website: [www.editorsqld.com](http://www.editorsqld.com); email: [membership@editorsqld.com](mailto:membership@editorsqld.com) (please also include your postal address).