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## What a Good Editor Is (and Is Not)

By Eliza Drewa

Editors are often viewed as enforcers, abusers, grammar police, interferers, delayers—they make arbitrary changes and interfere with creativity. And as a credit to writers, some of those views can certainly be justified. Let's face it, writers often work long and hard at their research and when it comes to details, such as whether the reference to figure 2 should be capitalized, details just don't seem to be important in the grand scheme of things. And if writers have good editors, they shouldn't have to be bothered with those types of details. But good editors have the ability to offer more:

- Conduct a rhetorical edit to ensure that a writer's intended message speaks loudly and clearly to the intended audience
- Consider issues of readability and usability
- Analyze content organization
- Ensure text contains a clear and concise vocabulary, using active and passive voice strategically
- Make specific recommendations for revising all of these areas rather than simply communicating what's wrong or lacking

The problem is that many frustrated writers likely have had—or seem to have had—experience working with inaccurate, unqualified, or careless editors. Thus, they are hesitant to (1) have their work edited by someone without knowledge of their technical field and (2) objectively consider the recommendations an editor may provide them.

The writer-editor relationship is an important one, one that is not often discussed openly between writer and editor. The purpose of this three-part series is to inform both writers and editors of their communication responsibilities in this relationship: Writers need to know who editors are, how to interact with them, what to ask for, and what to expect. Many editors have the benefit of also being writers and they need to draw on their experiences when they interact with writers. This series discusses the following issues:

1. What a good editor is (and is not)
2. What it means to conduct a rhetorical edit and to consider issues of readability and usability
3. What kinds of flexibility exist in language preferences and styles

*(continued on page 5)*



Rudy Joenk

### Anniversary

This is PCS's 45th year. Organizational meetings of writing-oriented members of the Institute of Radio Engineers, forerunner of the IEEE, began in the early spring of 1957. The first AdCom meeting was on 28 May 1957, so that date is essentially our birthday.

In the remaining issues this year I am extending by five years the lists of historic data that first appeared throughout the issues of 1997, which marked our 40th anniversary. For example, on page 9 are the extended list of IPCCs and their organizers and the list of PCS officers. Later I'll extend the award lists, the pastiche, and so on. If you'd like to contribute or suggest a recollection, please send a note to [r.joenk@ieee.org](mailto:r.joenk@ieee.org).

### Instant Fame

Maybe you thought I'd given up on this but I was just giving you a rest (there were two conferences last year). This is how we get coverage of our IPCCs for the *Newsletter*.

IPCC 2002 is drawing near, 17-20 September, and I offer **INSTANT FAME**

to volunteer authors who write just a paragraph or two about some of the presentations they attend. The idea is to capture a point of view, Q&A, discussion, etc. that isn't in the proceedings. Photographers, too, are eligible for this award. Up-close shots are best. If all of you reporters and picture takers work fast right after the conference, we might even get the fruit of your labors in the November/December issue (normal deadline is 15 September, before the conference).

Henrich Lantsberg reported that he has written about our Suzdal colloquium in two Russian publications.

### AdCom

Lisa Moretto resigned and Mark Haselkorn ([m.haselkorn@ieee.org](mailto:m.haselkorn@ieee.org)) was appointed to complete her term through 2003. Lisa had been on the AdCom since 1998. Mark is a former president of the society (1996-1997).

Please read the notice of the new election process on page 14 and of a proposed membership directory

on page 11. If you can't access our Web site to participate, request hard copy from the members named in the notices.

The next meetings are online on 27 July (if needed) and at IPCC 2002 in Portland, Oregon, on 21 September. Check the Web site (<http://www.ieeepcs.org/>) for details.

Note that the March/April *Newsletter* on our Web site as a PDF file has active e-mail and Web links. Issues are now being posted approximately one month after distribution of the print version.

**Deadlines are the 15th of the odd-numbered months.**

### Potpourri

"If the English language had been properly organized...then there would be a word which meant both 'he' and 'she,' and I could write, 'If John or Mary comes, heesh will want to play tennis,' which would save a lot of trouble." A. A. Milne in *The Christopher Robin Birthday Book*, 1930.

"'Take some more tea,' the March Hare said to Alice, very earnestly.

*(continued on page 4)*

### IEEE Professional Communication Society

#### Officers

- Beth Moeller, President
- Ed Clark, Vice President
- Jean-luc Doumont, Secretary
- Steve Robinson, Treasurer

#### Staff

Rudy Joenk, Editor

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Elizabeth Weise Moeller

## Institute Finances and Society Reserves

Last September, then-president George Hayhoe told everyone about the state of Institute (IEEE) finances and the outlook for the end of fiscal year 2001. In mid-March we finally received Institute financial results and their impact on PCS. The results were worse than expected. Consequently, we have had to put some initiatives on hold and we will be taking a hard look at how we, as a society, do business at our AdCom meeting in Atlanta.

### Institute Results

The combination of a poorly performing stock market, budgeted deficits, and the economic impact of the events of 11 September resulted in a corporate deficit close to USD 30 million. Since societies and councils are the primary intellectual property producers for the Institute, and each has financial reserves, we are the ones asked to cover the corporate deficit. We are reminded often through the process that society and council reserves are technically Institute funds.

To spread the deficit around and minimize impact on our reserves, the Institute implemented what society and council presidents are affectionately calling the IP tax (intellectual property tax). In addition to an approximately 30 percent reduction in our reserves, we were also taxed on our Book Broker and ASPP (all-society periodicals package) distribution income. The reserves reduction was just over USD 49k and the exact IP tax is yet to be determined. Last September the IEEE financial

department estimated our *total* reserve reduction between 1999 and 2001 would be about USD 49k. In reality, it may be double that.

Larger entities, such as the Communication Society and the Computer Society, saw their reserves reduced by millions of dollars. In an effort to distribute the charges more fairly, the IEEE Technical Activities Board (TAB) approved a new allocation method based on a *pay-by-the-drink* philosophy. In other words, allocations are based on services actually used instead of value of society or council reserves. While it sounds beneficial to a smaller society like ours, our allocation would actually increase under this model. We can only hope that the zero-deficit 2002 budget lives up to its name.

### Financial Implications for PCS

In addition, to help meet the mandated zero-deficit 2002 budget, societies and councils were asked to decrease their travel budget by 15 percent, increase their conference income, and decrease other expenses as much as possible.

Treasurer Steve Robinson, past president George Hayhoe, vice president Ed Clark, and I have worked hard to achieve the 15 percent reduction in travel. All AdCom members receive a travel stipend because we strongly feel that volunteers deserve to be reimbursed for their out-of-pocket expenses in traveling to AdCom meetings. Before you start thinking

*paid vacation*, AdCom members are reimbursed only for coach airfare, we locate meetings central to as many participants as possible, we have found some wonderful inexpensive hotels, and AdCom meetings run two days with at least seven hours per session.

We have been fortunate over the last two years to have Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and Mercer University donate meeting space and other items so that we can decrease

costs even further. Last year we reduced the number of in-person meetings from three to two. At this point our meeting budget is trimmed so thin that any further reduction request will be virtually impossible

to accommodate without decreasing travel stipends or further reducing the number of in-person meetings to one per year.

The second request was to increase our conference income for 2002. Since our IPCCs are held late in the year (17-20 September this year), conference income is actually applied to the following year. Therefore 2002 conference income is the income from last year's Santa Fe conference. Due to the events of 11 September, IPCC 2001 ran at a small deficit, with emphasis on *small*. There is no way PCS can now increase conference income for 2002. Our hope for the future is very successful 2002 and 2003 conferences.

Finally, as a result of all this, all society and council reserves have been

...revisit everything we do as a society and how we do it.



frozen. Since we were planning on advancing our Web-education project and portal/news service through reserve funding, we need to find another source. We are working to identify funding to get these projects off the ground. Suggestions are welcome and encouraged. Please e-mail me at [b.w.moeller@ieee.org](mailto:b.w.moeller@ieee.org).

### Plans for PCS

Since the deadline for this column is well before the April AdCom meet-

ing, it's hard to predict what will happen there. However, my goal is to revisit everything we do as a society and how we do it. In the context of our strategic plan, we will work to identify ways to increase revenue while keeping costs at bay. We will also work to identify creative funding to get revenue generating projects off the ground. If you want to help, please complete the volunteer form on our Web site (<http://www.ieeepcs.org/volunteer/>). When the

AdCom meeting is over, committee chairs will have laundry lists of tasks that need to be completed. If you are waiting for the right time to voice your opinion or offer your services, now is that time.

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**F**ault has been found with these articles that they are hard to read. They were, perhaps, hard to write.”  
— *Oliver Heaviside*

## From the Editor

(continued from page 2)

‘I’ve had nothing yet,’ Alice replied in an offended tone, ‘so I can’t take more.’ ‘You mean you can’t take less,’ said the Hatter: ‘It’s very easy to take *more* than nothing.’” Lewis Carroll in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, 1865.

The Yale and Stanford university libraries and the Peninsula Library System, a consortium of public and community libraries in San Mateo County [California], have decided to jump into the e-book arena. In January the libraries subscribed to a new service by Ebrary, an information distribution company based in Mountain View, California, that will enable them to offer the full text of electronic books to anyone with access to their online catalogs. (In the Peninsula system’s case, no proof of residency is required.) Lisa Guernsey in *The New York Times*.

Apsley House in London received the “Small visitor attraction of the year” award. Elyssa Downs in *World Wide Words*.

### Information for Authors

One thousand words makes a nice page-and-a-half article, though longer and shorter articles may be appropriate. Proposals for periodic columns are also welcome.

If you use a wp program, **keep your formatting simple**; multiple fonts and sizes, customized paragraphing and line spacing, personalized styles, etc. have to be filtered out before being recoded in *Newsletter* style. Headers, footers, and tables lead the casualty list. **Embed only enough specialized formatting and highlighting (boldface, italics, bullets) to show me your preferences.**

If you borrow text—more than a fair-use sentence or two—from previously

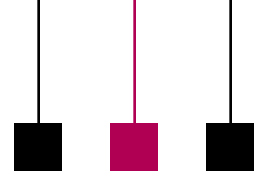
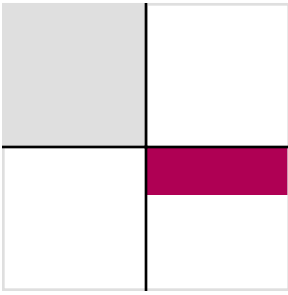
published material, you are responsible for obtaining written permission for its use. Ditto for graphics. Always give credit to the author or artist.

The *Newsletter* issues on our Web site can be used as examples (<http://www.ieeepcs.org/newsletter.html>).

I prefer to receive articles by e-mail; most WordPerfect, Word, RTF (rich text format), and ASCII files are acceptable. My addresses are in the boilerplate at the bottom of page 2.

### Deadlines

The 15th day of each odd-numbered month is the deadline for publication in the succeeding odd-numbered month. For example, the deadline is 15 July for the September/October issue, 15 September for the November/December issue, etc. You won’t be far off (and never late) if you observe the Ides of July, September, November, and so on.



## What a Good Editor Is

(continued from page 1)

A good editor is concerned with developing ethos with writers. Ethos is a rhetorical term which indicates trust, credibility. And there are a number of ways that editors can attempt to gain trust by establishing themselves as credible to writers, which is an essential step toward removing writer hesitancy and thus gaining an objective ear. So how do editors establish ethos with writers?

Gaining trust through credibility begins with empathy. Editors are generally trained as writers and must draw on their own experience of how it feels to receive feedback on writing. Most people are sensitive. Thus, when advising writers on what would make their documents stronger, editors should use care with the language they use: Tell a writer that they *recommend* a certain revision rather than dictate that this revision *must* take place.

Additionally, editors should provide specific reasons why their recommendations would make stronger documents and offer possible solutions for how to achieve the recommendations they make. Finally, when editors make changes to a document, they need to let writers know what they've changed and why, and ask writers to verify that they haven't changed meaning. This is easily achieved by providing authors with a specific list that outlines what changes they've made. (Microsoft Word's comments feature is useful for this purpose.)

Editors do not need to justify to writers every change they make

(there are some rules that are not negotiable; e.g., publication offices have their own stylistic and design preferences); however, good editors know when they are not entirely sure of a decision they'd like to make and will ask for verification from writers. For example, restrictive and nonrestrictive modification can be tricky. Traditionally, "that" is used for restrictive clauses and "which" for nonrestrictive clauses; however, this distinction is slowly disappearing, and writers are opting to use "which" in both cases.\* As a result, the specific rules for comma usage remain essential.

Unfortunately, Word's grammar checker supports the fallacy that a comma should always be placed before "which." If editors were to follow this direction, meaning could change seriously. Consider the following example:

Do not use company X software which contains serious susceptibilities.

As is, this sentence indicates that some, not all, of the software contains susceptibilities; it is restrictive. Consider the change in meaning when a comma is added:

\* *Editor's note:* I subscribe to what some call the pedant's view: "First, if you cannot omit the clause without changing the basic meaning, the clause is restrictive; use *that* without a comma. Second, if you can omit the clause without changing the basic meaning, the clause is nonrestrictive; use a comma plus *which*. Third, if you ever find yourself using a *which* that doesn't follow a comma, it probably needs to be a *that*." From *A Dictionary of Modern American Usage* by Bryan A. Garner, Oxford University Press, 1998.

Do not use company X software, which contains serious susceptibilities.

Simply adding a comma here changes the meaning drastically: Not just some, but all software contains susceptibilities; it is nonrestrictive. Good editors are aware of these dangers and will ask writers to verify meaning when necessary.

Writers must be open to hearing what editors have to say.

Clearly then, editors should not be dictators. After all, the final call on certain items should be up to the person who wrote the document, whose name is attached to whatever it represents.

Editors should use their language and writing expertise to point out alternative strategies, providing writers with evidence that should convince them to follow logical recommendations. However, just because editors are logical does not mean that writers will accept their direction. Writers must be open to hearing what editors have to say to bring attempted communication full circle; each can be responsible for only their portion of the relationship.

A variety of reasons may explain why some writers have worked with editors who seem to be inaccurate or careless. Some editorial offices have a small staff with an enormous workload, which may not allow editors the time and focus necessary to complete more than a quick-and-dirty edit. Some editors may have impressive educational credentials, which could

potentially lull them into a false sense of self-confidence (i.e., they may not try as hard). Still others may have been given an internal promotion without the proper training. And finally, editors are just like everybody else: Sometimes they simply have bad days.

Determining whether an editor is someone a writer can trust should not be based on one or two instances alone. Also, if an editor is not providing reasons for the recommendations he or she makes, writers shouldn't sim-

Good editors ask for verification from writers.

ply pass them off as poor editors; rather, they should ask them to justify their recommendations. There are many editors who have the ability to provide this kind of information, but simply don't realize that writers may not trust (or blindly trust, neither of which is ideal) what their editors recommend.

All of this follows a logical communication philosophy: Editors shouldn't simply fix writers' papers so that the authors are dependent on someone else for producing written documents (after all, editors

are still considered a luxury by most!), but should provide authors with information that will put them in control of their own work. And writers should be aware of the value of continually informing their writing practices, thus enhancing the quality of their written work.

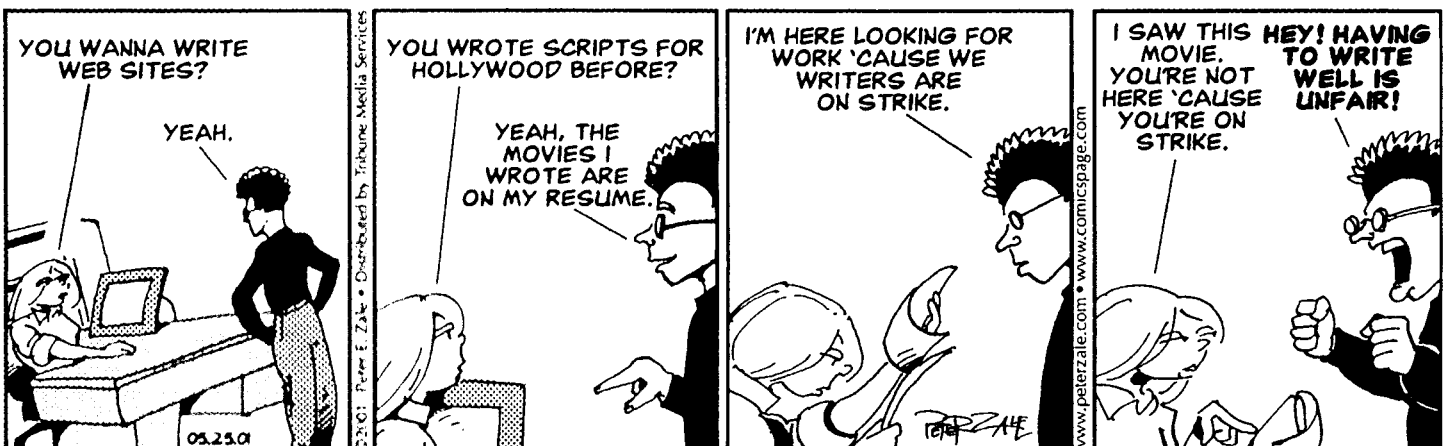
*The author is a technical editor for SpecPro, Inc., at the Army Research Laboratory at White Sands Missile Range, New Mexico. Her background and interests extend to research and writing, consulting, training, and teaching. She can be contacted at pedrewa@yahoo.com.*

## So...You Think You Know Everything?

- "Dreamt" is the only English word that ends in the letters "mt."
- Maine is the only state whose name is just one syllable.
- In most advertisements, the time displayed on a watch is 10:10.
- The characters Bert and Ernie on *Sesame Street* were named after Bert the cop and Ernie the taxi driver in Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life*.

## Best Headlines of the Year 2000:

- Juvenile court to try shooting defendant
- Stolen painting found by tree
- War dims hope for peace
- If strike isn't settled quickly, it may last a while



HELEN, SWEETHEART OF THE INTERNET by Peter Zale. Copyright 2001 by Tribune Media Services, Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.



Jean-luc Doumont

## Think Big!

“I don’t get it,” a frustrated training participant once told me as we were reviewing my feedback on his first homework assignment. “When I wrote my undergraduate thesis, I was told that technical documents should be written in the passive voice, so I did. Later, I read an article on technical writing in which the author encouraged readers to write everything in the active voice, so I started doing that. And now you are recommending that I change this active voice, here, into a passive one?” Why, yes. “But what’s wrong with my sentence in the active voice?” Oh, nothing, really—but something’s wrong with your paragraph.

Discussions about the active versus the passive voice are a classroom (or editing room) classic. Yet they are but one illustration of a broader issue: that of local versus global thinking. True, much scientific and technical writing suffers from an overuse of the passive voice. Still, should every passive verb simply be turned (oops!) into an active one? Not necessarily.

One guideline I believe in for writing effective sentences suggests having “the subject be the subject,” that is, having the subject of the discussion (the topic) be the grammatical subject of the sentence. The verb voice, active or passive, then follows. Should we write “The samples were analyzed by the operator” (passive voice) or “The operator analyzed the samples” (active voice)? It all depends: Are we talking about the samples or about the operator?

“Prose is architecture, not interior decoration.”

The question “What are we talking about?” can often not be answered for a single sentence. Rather, it more appropriately applies to a paragraph or a group of sentences.

To decide whether our sentence should focus on the samples or on the operator, we would be well advised to establish the topic of the paragraph first. A paragraph devoted to the samples might be structured thus: “The samples were analyzed by the operator. They contained...” By contrast, one devoted to (work by) the operator might look thus: “The operator analyzed the samples. She determined...”

Global thinking, in other words, has priority over local thinking: Sentence-level editing with no attention to paragraph structure is shortsighted. Whereas a sentence in the active voice may seem more readable in isolation than the matching sentence in the passive voice, it may endanger the coherence of the paragraph and thus not be preferable.

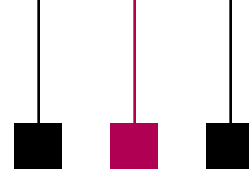
Still, a careful choice of grammatical subject on the basis of paragraph organization, not sentence voice, is no excuse for uncalled-for passive voices. Removing the passive voice, however, may require a more creative rewriting than simply turning the sentence around and having the subject become the object. Often, a change of verb will do the trick (“The samples underwent analysis”). Sometimes, a more thorough reorganization yields better results still (“According to the analysis, the samples contained...”).

The impact of global choices on local ones is not limited to the verbal component. It applies equally well to non-verbal ones, such as the page layout. The balance and coherence of the full page (or, better still, of the *spread*) must thus influence more local design decisions, such as how paragraphs are set.

As an example, various experiments suggest that text set ragged-right (as in this *Newsletter*) is more legible than justified text (aligned left and right). Should we therefore abandon justification altogether? Not at all, for we should consider the legibility of the page before we decide how to set individual paragraphs. Depending on how the page is organized and what other graphical or text elements it displays, justified paragraphs may reveal the overall structure better than ragged-right ones, in which case they would be (ahem) “justified.”

As Ernest Hemingway put it, “Prose is architecture, not interior decoration.” Sound documents, like sound buildings, are designed from big to small: Local preferences must not be allowed to endanger global designs. Let us thus beware of simplistic, absolute guidelines, such as “always use the active voice” or “always set text ragged-right.” Whether we write, edit, or format, let us “think big.”

*Dr. Jean-luc Doumont teaches and provides advice on professional speaking, writing, and graphing. For over 15 years, he has helped audiences of all ages, backgrounds, and nationalities structure their thoughts and construct their communication (<http://www.JLConsulting.be>).*



## Super Grammar

By Michael Brady

On the roof again, I was fiddling with the new TV antenna I had just put up to improve reception from the station on a hilltop 15 miles away. It had 6 dB more gain than our old antenna; I had put in new coax cable and double-checked all the connectors; I had used a compass to aim it at the transmitter tower. But reception remained fuzzy. The new antenna was a flop. I was about to take it down to go over all its connections again when my wife came out, glanced up at the roof, pointed at right angles to the direction I had aimed the antenna, and asked: “Shouldn’t the little end go that way?” So I swivelled the antenna 90 degrees and went in to see if that helped. It did; she was right. My familiarity with the theory of the Yagi-Uda array hadn’t helped because I had taken the wrong compass bearing. If you aim wrong, you don’t get the picture.

Grammar is much like that. No knowledge of it will help if you can’t spot basic flaws. In writing, as in technology, there’s a difference between theory and practice. Arguably, theory dominates in grammar, which is why there are so many grammars and style manuals. Grammarians pontificate upon it. Editors critique in terms of it. Publications for professionals, such as this *Newsletter*, are full of stuff on it. Yet, in practice, none of it helps when you are faced with a recalcitrant sentence that you cannot fix. Just like being unable to find a word that you cannot spell in a dic-

tionary (because dictionaries presuppose that their users can spell), you cannot fix a grammatical flaw if you don’t know which grammatical principles govern it.

Why is that so? Why, in this age of communication, do so many see grammar as a maze of ethereal rules difficult to apply in practice? About 10 years ago that question impelled Graham King (1930-1999) to act. He was the right man at the right time. And he had the right background for the task—he was not a grammarian. Before joining Rupert Murdoch’s burgeoning media empire in the 1960s, he had been trained as a cartographer and draftsman in his native Australia. He became the kingpin of Murdoch’s marketing, transforming the *Sun* into Britain’s best-selling tabloid and reconstructing *The Sunday Times* as a multisection newspaper.

He was a poet, biographer, novelist, watercolorist, and landscape gardener. In his work he had found most books on grammar to be unreadable and impractical. So he developed the accessible, reader-friendly *One-Hour Wordpower* series of eight monographs first published by *The Sunday Times* in 1993. The books were small: Together the eight weigh just one pound and were set in large type with an airy layout conducive to reading. Here was grammar viewed from the practice

of it. From *Good Grammar* to *Wordplay and Word Games* (two of the original titles), here were the simple, practical tools and hints that could be used by anyone. The books were instant best sellers; within a year they were sold out. Now they’re collector’s items. Last August in London I saw a set in a used-book shop with an asking price three times the original cover price of GBP 2.99 (about USD 4.25) per book.

That’s the bad news. The good news is that Graham King revised, expanded, and rearranged the books into the *Collins Wordpower* series of eight handy paperbacks.\* At GBP 5.99 (USD 8.50) each, they’re a bargain compared to other references used by word-smiths. They’re simple and straightforward, devoid of didactic fog.

You cannot fix a grammatical flaw if you don’t know which grammatical principles govern it.

What’s grammar? A set of common-sense principles that you probably could practice well even if you never fathomed them. What’s a verb? It’s the engine that makes the sentence go (so much easier to remember than those rules about the subject and the predicate). How can you achieve tight writing? Easy: Think economically. Some of the greatest thoughts in history have been brief: The Ten

\* Graham King: The *Collins Wordpower* series: *Good Grammar*, ISBN 0-00-472374-0; *Punctuation*, 0-00-472373-3; *Super Speller*, 0-00-472371-6; *Good Writing*, 0-00-472381-3; *Vocabulary Expander*, 0-00-43762382-1; *Abbreviations*, 0-00-472389-9; *Foreign Phrases*, 0-00-472388-0; and *Word Check*, 0-00-472378-3; Glasgow, Harper Collins, 2000, paperback.

(continued on page 11)



## The Officers of PCS

The first table of this data appeared in the July/August 1997 *Newsletter*, which was the year of PCS's 40th anniversary; this five-year update acknowledges our 45th anniversary.

YEAR	PRESIDENT	VICE PRESIDENT	SECRETARY	TREASURER
1998	Roger A. Grice	George F. Hayhoe	Muriel L. Zimmerman	William P. Kehoe
1999	Roger A. Grice	George F. Hayhoe	Muriel L. Zimmerman	William P. Kehoe
2000	George F. Hayhoe	Elizabeth Weise Moeller	Eduardo H. Clark	William P. Kehoe
2001	George F. Hayhoe	Elizabeth Weise Moeller	Eduardo H. Clark	Steven E. Robinson
2002	Elizabeth W. Moeller	Eduardo H. Clark	Jean-luc Doumont	Steven E. Robinson

William Kehoe is the longest serving office holder by a factor of two: treasurer 1986 through 2000. John C. Phillips, also treasurer, served 1976 through 1982, and as president in 1972. Daniel Rosich was the longest serving president, 1982 through 1985. James M. Lufkin was the only president to serve two separate terms, 1968 and 1975.

## The History of PCS Conferences

The first table of this data appeared in the September/October 1997 *Newsletter*, which was the year of PCS's 40th anniversary; this five-year update acknowledges our 45th anniversary.

DATE LOCATION CONFERENCE CHAIR	CONFERENCE TITLE OR THEME PROGRAM CHAIR
23-25 September 1998 Québec City, Canada Ronald S. Blicq	A Contemporary Renaissance: Changing the Way We Communicate Lisa A. Moretto
7-10 September 1999 New Orleans, Louisiana Michael B. Goodman	Communication Jazz: Improvising the New International Communication Culture David F. Hans and Robert Krull
24-27 September 2000 Cambridge, Massachusetts Elizabeth W. Moeller Susan B. Jones (SIGDOC)	Technology and Teamwork (with ACM SIGDOC) Bernadette C. Longo Michael F. C. Priestley (SIGDOC)
15-16 August 2001 Suzdal, Russia Henrich S. Lantsberg (Popov) Lisa A. Moretto	International Colloquium on Professional Communication (with A. S. Popov Society) Mark Kolchinsky (Popov) Peter Zoudkov (Popov)
24-27 October 2001 Santa Fe, New Mexico Joseph T. Chew	Communication Dimensions Roger A. Grice
17-20 September 2002 Portland, Oregon Laurel K. Grove	Reflections on Communication Pamela R. Kostur



Peter Reimold and Cheryl Reimold

## How to Write Readable Reports and Winning Proposals

### Part 1: Grab Your Reader with a PAW

Whether your opening is an abstract, an executive summary, or an unnamed couple of paragraphs, its goal is the same: to give your readers the essence of what follows and show them why it is important to them. If you do that, you will catch their interest and entice them to continue reading. One good success formula is to grab them with a PAW.

PAW stands for Purpose, Action/Achievement, What Next. It's an easy acronym to remember for the beginning of a piece of writing, as it mirrors the opening handshake of a conversation. Let's see why it works.

#### P Stands for Purpose

Why did you do the work that is the subject of your report? What was the problem it intended to solve? The question it hoped to answer? The complaint it set out to resolve? The idea it planned to test? The new product it sought to create?

Those questions lead you to the purpose of your work—the P of your opening PAW. By relating the purpose to the readers' interests, you immediately show them why your report or proposal will be interesting to them.

Let's take an example of a report. Suppose you are part of a task force to discover how the work people are doing matches their official job descriptions. Having interviewed about one-third of the department employees, members of the task

force agree that the project is not working. People don't want to answer the questions. When they do speak, their statements match neither their job descriptions nor the work you know they do. The task force has decided to send the department head (who organized this somewhat inane exercise) a progress report. You have been delegated to write it.

Your opening should begin with the purpose (the P of the PAW):

The Departmental Task Force was created to determine how the work performed in this department matches the official descriptions of each job.

If you are writing a proposal, the purpose is usually even simpler. It is the need of the customer that you are proposing to solve:

ABC Food Service requires affordable disposable trays that will not stick to hot substances placed on them.

#### A Stands for Achievement or Action

Now that your readers know the purpose behind your project or proposal, they are ready for an indication of your findings or proposals in service of this purpose.

For report writers, this means stating what you have you accomplished:

Our interviews with one-third of the department members have produced inconclusive and conflicting responses. We believe this is

because people are unwilling to answer the questions accurately for fear of putting their jobs at risk.

For proposal writers: What action do you propose to solve the customer's need?

The Careful Chemists Corporation proposes to coat the disposable trays with XYZ in a patented two-step method described in this proposal.

#### W Stands for What Next

In a few lines, you have shown your readers the *past* (the purpose of the work) and the *present* (the achievements or results). If that covers the work you are reporting, stop there. When it is meaningful and useful, however, complete your opening with a sketch of the *future*. What do you plan to do next, or what do you recommend?

A good opening gives the reader a PAW: Purpose, Action/Achievement, What Next.

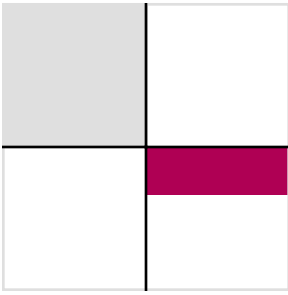
Here are two possible W's for the report and proposal openings:

The Task Force proposes holding a meeting to examine other methods of gathering the information before continuing with this project.

We would welcome the opportunity to present this solution to ABC with samples of similar products.

These two openings each contain only three to four sentences but they give the essence of the report or proposal to follow:

The Departmental Task Force was created to determine how the work performed in this department matches the official descriptions of each job.



Our interviews with one-third of the department members have produced inconclusive and conflicting responses. We believe this is because people are unwilling to answer the questions accurately for fear of putting their jobs at risk. The Task Force proposes holding a meeting to examine other methods of gathering the information before continuing with this project.

ABC Food Service requires affordable disposable trays that will not stick to hot substances placed on

them. The Careful Chemists Corporation proposes to coat the disposable trays with XYZ in a patented two-step method described in this proposal. We would welcome the opportunity to present this solution to ABC with samples of similar products.

Begin by telling your readers what you're doing, why it matters, and what should follow it. That prepares both them and you for a report or proposal focused on their interests, not just yours.

*Cheryl and Peter Reimold have been teaching communication skills to engineers, scientists, and business-people for 20 years. Their firm, PERC Communications (+1 914 725 1024, perccom@aol.com), offers businesses consulting and writing services, as well as customized in-house courses on writing, presentation skills, and on-the-job communication skills. Visit their web site at <http://www.allaboutcommunication.com>.*

## Membership Directory

During the online AdCom meeting in January, the idea of creating a PCS membership directory was presented. Some of the goals we might achieve by creating a directory are:

- Networking
- Fostering mentoring relationships

- Keeping in contact with members

We are exploring options about the best way to accomplish this (online, print, opt-in, opt-out, etc.) Please let us know whether you think this resource would be helpful and what information should be included.

You can do this by completing the

short survey at <http://www.ieeepcs.org/directory.html>. If you cannot access the Web site, please request hard copy information by 1 July from:

Beth Moeller  
15 1/2 Jumel Place  
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866

## Floccinaucinihilipilification

*(continued from page 8)*

Commandments are expressed in just 130 words, the Declaration of Independence in just 485. And so on; here's everything you need to know about grammar without the boring bits. And there are many examples of how to put your

message across well, from writing a marriage proposal to disputing a builder's bill. And, yes, there's a comprehensive guide on how to compute the Fog Index.

Theoretical grammar always will have its place, just as Maxwell's

equations have their place in describing antennas. But whenever I have aimed wrongly, whenever I need to fix a recalcitrant sentence or otherwise fix or polish my product, I reach for King, on the shelf just above my PC screen.



## Agreeable Verbs

Where has my sister, the laudable Professor Grammar, been hiding? Perhaps she has joined an underground wine-tasting cult. Perhaps she is taking an extended stay at the Hotel California. Whatever the case, I think we all agree that we might want a few troublesome verb agreement problems explained. Therefore, I, Dr. Grammatica, offer this valuable advice about verb agreement.

The top five most difficult verb agreement rules are:

1. Subject complements (predicate adjectives/nominatives)
2. Collective nouns
3. Either/or, neither/nor, or, nor
4. Subjects with prepositional phrases
5. Indefinite pronouns and words that describe amounts (time, money, distances, measurements, and percentages)

Most subject-verb agreement decisions come naturally to native speakers. However, a few verb agreement rules still seem to elude even the most astute writers.

### 1. Verbs must agree with subjects, not subject complements (predicate adjectives/nominatives).

Subject complements are nouns or adjectives that occur after linking verbs (such as *appear*, *seem*, *become*, *be*). Sometimes the nominal subject complement gives us pause:

The topic of the report is TCP/IP networks.

*Topic* is the subject of the sentence. *Networks* is the subject complement. The verb must agree with topic, not with networks.

### 2. Be careful with those slippery collective nouns—they can be singular or plural. If the group is acting as a single unit, treat the collective noun as singular. If the members of the group act independently, treat the collective noun as plural. (Don't forget to use the correct pronouns.)

The jury is offering its verdict.  
The jury are debating among themselves.

The second sentence is grammatically correct because the individuals who make up the jury are acting independently. Groups can debate with other groups, but a group cannot argue with itself (unless those poor souls suffer from multiple personality disorder). Nevertheless, current usage avoids such constructions because they seem awkward. If you feel so inclined, rewrite the second sentence and add *the members of* the jury. Also note that our friends across the Atlantic, the British, are more likely to treat collective nouns as plural as opposed to us Yanks who treat most collective nouns as singular. Americans just have to be different.

Other collective nouns are *class*, *team*, *committee*, *army*, *flock*, *group*, *faculty*, *family*, *audience*, *staff*, and *crew*. Another troublesome term is *data*, which is the plural spelling of datum. Though data traditionally refers to a group of disparate items, most dictionaries and style guides, IBM included, *treat data as singular*.

The data in the data warehouse is new.

We rarely see the term datum these days, which is just as well. Using datum might possibly scare our poor readers.

### 3. When two subjects are joined by *or*, *either/or*, or *neither/nor*, the verb must agree in number with the subject closest to the verb.

The database or the networks have failed.  
The networks or the database has failed.

Neither the dogs nor the cat expects restitution.  
Either the cat or the dogs expect restitution.

### 4. Prepositional phrases rarely influence verb agreement.

Be careful with phrases such as *together with*, *as well as*, *along with*, and *with*. These phrases do not make subjects plural.

The editor together with the writers is enjoying the party.

I know what you are thinking. Some of you believe the sample sentence to

(continued on page 16)

Writers have used none as both singular and plural since the ninth century.

## 10 Things to Keep in Mind When Designing Your Web Site

By Patricia McClelland

There are so many things to remember when you are designing your Web site. But if you follow this advice, you will be 10 steps ahead of the competition!

**1. When you have just decided to go online with your business, hurry to **choose names** (several) even before you set up your Web site. A name should evoke the business you are in or be the name of your off-line business.**

- Choose a name that is intuitive for your customers, a name that would come to their minds when looking for you, and a name that is easy to remember.
- Keep the names short and uncomplicated.
- Avoid hyphenated names, names with periods in them, and names that can have multiple spellings.
- Don't tell anyone about the names you have chosen.
- Check them all to see if they are available. Names for Web sites are taken up very fast; some people even buy up names to sell later to unsuspecting people like us. Don't wait until all the suitable names are taken up like this company did: <http://www.4adodge.com/>. Can you guess whose Web site this is? Dodge Motor Company. The name really doesn't make sense, does it? (Standalone "dodge" became available later and was purchased by Dodge Motor Com-

pany; it now redirects visitors to "4adodge.")

- Register the names you think could really be good for your business; one registrar, for example, is <http://www.networksolutions.com>.

### **2. Plan, plan, plan.**

Decide why you are going on the Web. Is it to sell goods? Make information available? Whatever the reason, it conditions the entire content of your Web site. Plan the content, the navigation, and the visual presentation of your site. Build a prototype and test your site over and over again. Don't forget: Failing to plan is planning to fail.

**3. Make sure visitors to your site can contact you** by e-mail, telephone, postal mail, and fax; give them all the possibilities for contacting you. And make it easy to find that information on your site, putting it on every page. Answer inquiries in less than 48 hours, preferably in less than 24 hours.

It's in your best interest to get feedback from your users. Visitors may have questions for you that they could not find answers to on your Web site. Maybe there is something you forgot to put there or a problem you overlooked. Your users will tell you about it. Consider feedback as a positive

way to improve your site. If there is no address, users take this to mean that you do not want them to contact you. And that can create a very bad impression.

### **4. Do not use all capital letters.**

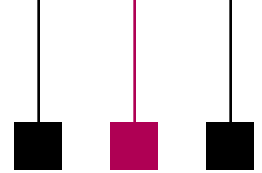
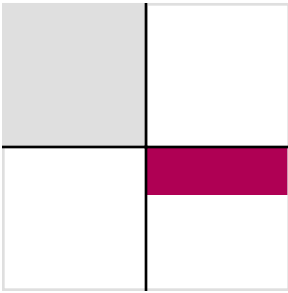
Such messages are hard to read because capital letters have less silhouette than lowercase letters. Consider: WE NEED TO HAVE A STRATEGY and *We need to have a strategy*. Which is easier to read? Also, Web users consider all capital letters as shouting.

Why you are going on the Web conditions the entire content of your site.

**5. Choose only two fonts** for your site. More than two fonts make your pages look confusing. Choose one font for the titles, such as Arial or Verdana, and another for the text, such as Times New Roman.

**6. For easy reading use a minimum font size of 11 points.** Make page headings slightly bigger. Do you know that people read 28 percent less well on a monitor than on paper? Look at <http://www.bmw.com> for a modern ad with print that is too small.

**7. Make sure you have enough color contrast** on your site. Use colors that have enough contrast for your information to be visible. White text on a yellow background is not contrasty enough. Do you know that nine percent of all people are color blind? The colors they do not see are red and green.



It is a good idea not to have either of those as the main color in your design. Also, background images or wallpaper designs usually make it harder for your customer to read.

Unless you must use certain corporate colors, experiment with colors and backgrounds. You can do this in *PowerPoint*, for example: Choose *Blank Presentation*, then go to *Format*, choose the *Font* and *Color* for the text, and then choose *Color Scheme*.

**8. Put less information** on your Web pages and your customers will be able to see more. Write the

copy for your site; then reduce it by 50 percent. Chock-full pages are hard to read and appear busy. Leave some white space for visual relaxation. Look at <http://www.delta.com/home/index.jsp> for a non-crowded, non-cluttered site.

**9. Always underline words if they are links** (a convention in Web design). It helps the user recognize that the word or phrase is a link. Never underline them if they are not links because when the user clicks on them, they will not take him anywhere. This annoys the user.

**10. Use only graphics that contribute meaning** to your Web site. Use graphics to illustrate, not to decorate; for example, you might want to show what your new product looks like. Look at <http://www.vw.com/newbeetle/index.htm> for a product illustration.

*Patricia McClelland is a Paris-based consultant for e-Storm International Consulting (<http://www.e-Storm.com>), a Web marketing firm based in San Francisco with an office in Paris. She has taught Web prototype design and cybermarketing to companies such as France Telecom and Alstom. She has also been a lecturer at the American University of Paris for two years.*

## AdCom Election Notice

The Professional Communication Society constitution and bylaws were amended recently (see notice in the January/February 2002 *Newsletter*, p. 7) to provide direct election of three administrative committee (AdCom) members each year by members of the society at large. (Three others are to be elected annually by the AdCom.)

The AdCom is composed of 18 volunteers who work to assure that our society serves its members, the IEEE, and the field of technical and professional communication. Information about candidates stand-

ing for election to the AdCom for the term 2003-2005 is available at (<http://www.ieeepcs.org/candidates.htm>).

Voting will take place on the Web site beginning in July. Additional information will be available in the July/August issue of the *Newsletter*. If you cannot access the Web site, please request hard copy information by 1 July from:

Kim Sydow Campbell  
Box 870225  
University of Alabama  
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0225 USA

Travel Term	Translation
All the amenities	Two free shower caps
Plush	Top and bottom sheets
Gentle breezes	Occasional gale-force winds
Light and airy	No air conditioning
Picturesque	Theme park nearby
Open bar	Free ice cubes

## Information Incognito

By Joan G. Nagle

*“There are some that only employ words for the purpose of disguising their thoughts”* (Voltaire, ca. 1763).

Well, we knew that, didn’t we... those of us in the technical editing biz. Clarity seems not to be the purpose in much of the material that comes to us for review; the authors have used words (and phrases, and paragraphs, and whole documents) for the purpose of impressing the reader with how many they know. (Or think they know.)

What we didn’t know, but may have suspected, is that the use of what Voltaire calls thought-disguising words may often be intentional. “Weasel words” (qualifiers) may be used for the purpose of protecting the writer. In *Effective Revenue Writing* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1961) Calvin D. Linton quotes a government employee: “Look, it’s taken me 10 years to learn how to write this way. If I wrote the way you say, I’d have my neck stuck out in so many different directions I’d be bound to lose my head just on the law of averages.”

A more recent source of information on this subject is *Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters* by David Hockney (New York: Viking Studio, 2001). Hockney’s thesis (hotly debated in the art world) is that, beginning in the early 15th century,

many western artists used optical devices to create projections of real life scenes onto paper or canvas or whatever, where they could then be traced to form at least the basis for a finished work.

Unfortunately, Hockney did not have the benefit of a competent technical editor, and throughout his labored explanations of how this art-process was done and the devices involved, I yearned for better (which is to say, more scientific) descriptions. Since Hockney is not a scientist (perhaps, as a working artist, he is the very antithesis of a scientist), maybe this was too much to expect. One would think, however, that he would have been able to produce good (which is to say, effective) diagrams of the camera lucida and camera obscura that he suggests the old masters used.

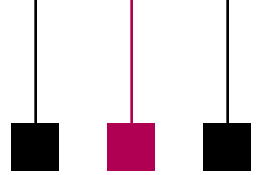
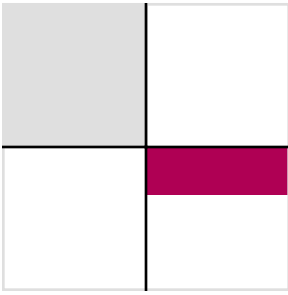
But enough of my problems. What is relevant here is the lack, near total, of documentary evidence for Hockney’s theory.

“Where are the contemporary writings? Where are the lenses?” he asks. “I know that artists are secretive about their methods—they are today, and...they were probably even more secretive in the past. In medieval and Renaissance Europe, for instance, those who revealed the ‘secrets’ of God’s kingdom might have been accused of sorcery and burned at the stake!” The Inquisition was a fairly recent memory, and look what happened to Galileo.

Then too, there was personal belief. William Romaine Newbold, writing in *The Cipher of Roger Bacon*, says: “Bacon’s reticence about his discoveries...was not entirely, nor, I think chiefly, due to fear of persecution; it was grounded in his most sacred convictions. He was profoundly religious; in everything he saw the hand of God. The mere fact that the secrets of nature had then so long been hidden is to him conclusive proof that God wills it so to be. The solitary scholar who succeeds in lifting a corner of the veil has, he believed, been admitted by God to his confidence, and is thereby placed under the most solemn obligation conceivable to make no use of his knowledge which God would not approve. Especially must he be careful not to betray it to the vulgar.” Thus, scientists wrote in either the obscure language of philosophers, in peculiar technical terms (such as were used by alchemists), or in cipher.

Manufacturing methods for the lenses themselves were also secret, but in this case jealously guarded for commercial reasons. Although the Venetian glassmakers guild was formed in the early 1200s, the construction of furnaces, the formulas and proportions of ingredients, and the tools used were based on knowledge handed down orally, probably through the apprenticeship system. Not until 1612 did a book (*L’Arte Vetraria* by Antonio Nori) make those secrets public.

“Especially must he be careful not to betray it to the vulgar.”



To sum up, Hockney’s quotation from Roger Bacon (ca. 1214-94) speaks to the problems that still face technical writers (I have cleaned up Bacon’s archaic spellings...for clarity!):

Now the cause of this concealment among all wise men is the contempt and neglect of the secrets of wisdom by the vulgar sort, that knoweth not how to use those things which

are most excellent....So that he is worse than mad that publisheth any secret, unless he conceal it from the multitude, and in such wise deliver it, *that even the studious and learned shall hardly understand it* [italics added]. This hath been the course which wise men have observed from the beginning, who by many means have hidden the secrets of wisdom from the common people.

*The author is retired from some 30 years of technical editing and writing. A former member of PCS, she was a long-time contributor to this Newsletter (Curmudgeon’s Corner, January 1990 through September/October 1997 issues). She may be contacted at jgnagle@scescape.net or by snail mail at 104 Crane Court, Aiken, SC 29803.*

## Professor Grammar

(continued from page 12)

be awkward. Fine. Rewrite it and use *and* instead of *together with*. In general, avoid these expressions in your writing. Use *and* to join two subjects or objects.

Grammar faux pas: Do not use *as well as* interchangeably with *and*. They are not synonymous. *As well as* means as much or truly as or equally as.

**5. Indefinite pronouns** such as *everyone, each, and anybody* are usually treated as singular.

Each of the tables is stored in memory.

However, a few indefinite pronouns such as *most, some, many, none, and enough* can be singular or plural depending on the phrase that directly follows them.

Some of the tables are stored in memory.

Some of the information is stored in the data mart.

There is some debate over *none*. Some grammarians treat it as singular in all cases, especially when it clearly means not one. Others believe it should be treated as singular or plural depending on the phrase that directly follows it. Writers have used *none*

as both singular and plural since the ninth century.

None of the tables are stored in memory.

None of the information is stored in the data mart.

Mrs. Wiggins [Dr. Grammatica’s parrot] claims that if she does not soon imbibe some proper ale from the Coughing Pig, she will cease to exist. Therefore, we are off for a few pints and a round of Trivial Pursuit for the eclectically corrupted.

Prepositional phrases rarely influence verb agreement.

Copyright 2001 by IBM Corporation. Used with permission. Professor Grammar is an advisor to the IBM Santa Teresa Laboratory Editing Council. Each month she sends a lesson to the technical writers at the Laboratory. Many of the Professor’s lessons are based on tenets described in the Prentice-Hall book *Developing Quality Technical Information: A Handbook for Writers and Editors*, recently authored by the Council.

If you need further proof that the human race is doomed through stupidity, here are some label instructions on consumer goods:

- On an American Airlines packet of nuts: “Instructions: Open packet, eat nuts.”
- On a child’s Superman costume: “Wearing of this garment does not enable you to fly.”





Ronald J. Nelson

## The Unconventional Vitality of David Quammen

Those who teach writing often emphasize sticking to the rules of grammar. Those who learn writing from such educators, however, may produce competent documents that lack vitality. The ideal of course is documents that are somehow both competent and alive. But one might ask: How to convey the life sensation? At least part of the answer is to have an enthusiasm for subject matter and to sally forth in unexpected ways with selective departures from the conventional. Such an approach does not mean unbridled disregard for the rules, but rather an occasional putting aside of rules to achieve the higher purpose of making a subject vivid and memorable. Professional communicators can learn much about invigorating strategies from studying a writer who masterfully employs them: David Quammen.

Quammen's credentials are impressive: He was a Rhodes Scholar in 1970, a recipient of the National Magazine Award for essays and criticism in 1987, and a Guggenheim Fellow in 1988. For fifteen years (1981-1996) he wrote a monthly nature column entitled "Natural Acts" for the magazine *Outside*. His output also includes nine books: four fiction and five nonfiction. The former are *Blood Line: Stories of Fathers and Sons* (Graywolf, 1988), *The Soul of Viktor Tronko* (Doubleday, 1987), *The Zolta Configuration* (Doubleday, 1983), and *To Walk the Line* (Knopf, 1970). The latter include *Natural Acts* (Schocken, 1985), *The Flight of the Iguana* (Delacorte Press, 1988), *The Song of the Dodo: Island Biogeography in an Age of Extinctions*

(Scribner, 1996), *Wild Thoughts from Wild Places* (Scribner, 1998), and *The Boilerplate Rhino: Nature in the Eye of the Beholder* (Scribner, 2000).

Critical reaction to his work has been almost exclusively positive. John Leonard of *The New York Times*, in speaking of Quammen's first novel *To Walk the Line*, said that "what distinguishes Mr. Quammen's book is its humor, ... the electric quality of its prose and a sense of the energy that flows between people..." Of *Natural Acts*, Bil [sic] Gilbert in *The Washington Post Book World* noted that although Quammen is not a professional scientist, his work "is sound science since it raises substantive issues about why things are as they are—the nature of nature." And Tom O'Brien of *Commonweal* observed that Quammen "writes in a style at once incisive and graceful, with a sure sense of the ring of English sentences and the value of stunning images."

In *The Flight of the Iguana*, for example, Quammen uses a variety of offbeat strategies to enliven his subject matter, including deliberate sentence fragments; words that are so pointed and surprising in the context that they burst the bubble of pomposity; shifts in point of view and tone; humor; and science as a springboard to explore related philosophical, political, and other subjects. As Harry Middleton put it in *The New York Times Book Review*, Quammen's prose is "loaded with ideas and emotion that [are] as thrill-

ling and upsetting as a wild ride on a slightly unsettled roller coaster."

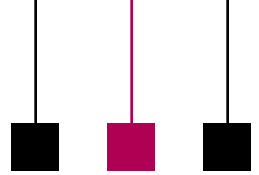
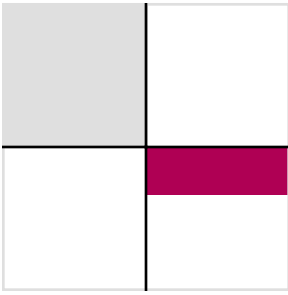
Even the chapter titles of *Flight* compel the reader to look at nature in a new way, discarding vague takes on the creatures that share the planet with us: The Face of the Spider, Thinking About Earthworms, Stalking the Gentle Piranha, The Lonesome Ape, and The Miracle of the Geese. The reader's previous notion of these animals is immediately arrested and forced to envision them from a slightly different vantage point.

Occasionally, use somewhat unorthodox methods to tap into the reader's curiosity.

The beginning of his introduction, *The Mouse Is Miracle Enough*, provides a reliable indication of the techniques he uses throughout the book:

The pageant of nature: Sometimes it seems like a freak show. You hear the nasal chant of the barker, you follow the pull of the prurient curiosity, you pay the dime, step through the flap of the tent into musky darkness and nose-flute music and when your eyes have adjusted you see there, sure enough, those garish living shapes. The spoon worm. The okapi. The red-footed booby. The plant that eats frogs.

Therein can be observed the startling imagery and related diction of a freak show to lure the reader into the attraction (nature); the point-of-view shift; the deliberate sentence fragments, each of which causes the reader momentarily to contemplate the subject individually; the comfortingly folksy "sure enough." For Quammen and for the reader, the



point is not the quirkiness of nature but that all creatures are “the legitimate scions of organic evolution.” That they are considerably different from us prompts Quammen into the vitally important related point that xenophobia is a problem people need to overcome if they are to have a true picture of nature.

The two subjects that “tangle their ways throughout the book” are the intricacies of nature and people’s attitudes toward those intricacies. As he says, the black widow spider, the marine iguana, and the rest of our cohabitants of the planet are “all ineluctably connected.” Invoking the analogy of Chinese nesting boxes, Quammen guides the reader down toward a “hidden center”: “The mystery and magic we’re chasing in this collective entity called nature is really everywhere; like the God of the pantheists, it inheres somehow in every leaf, every mite, every cell.”

Sally forth with selective departures from the conventional.

In the title chapter of *Flight*—although we could examine any chapter—Quammen works with seeming effortless to affect the reader’s attitude by narrating obscure points (like Darwin’s experimenting with grabbing a marine iguana by the tail, tossing it into the sea repeatedly, and watching it return to the same rocks, presumably a habit picked up from witnessing the predatory nature of sharks in open waters). By reflecting on “what—if anything—is going on behind those inscrutable hooded eyes [of the iguana as it suns itself on a rock],” Quammen invites the

reader into the very mind of the animal. “Are these animals truly stupid and sluggish? Or are they just dignified and calm?” By observing the behavior of the iguana, conjecturing on what it may or may not mean, and recognizing his place in the scheme of things, Quammen shares with the reader his appreciation of this creature:

Occasionally the big male bobs his head, a quick series of three or four jerky nods that seem to say: *Believe it, Jack, I’m the baddest dude on this piece of beach.* At one point two females come face-to-face and blow salt out their nostrils at each other. Mainly they all bask. They are poised and opaque. They seem utterly indifferent to time’s passage, boat traffic nearby, the herpetological puzzlement they have inspired, and the large pink creature sitting among them again today with a ring notebook and sun-burned ears.

The analogy used in the opening of *The Song of the Dodo* provides in its unorthodox style the groundwork for the whole of the book:

Let’s start indoors. Let’s start by imagining a fine Persian carpet and a hunting knife. The carpet is twelve feet by eighteen, say. That gives us 216 square feet of continuous woven material. Is the knife razor-sharp? If not, we hone it. We set about cutting the carpet into thirty-six equal pieces, each one a rectangle, two feet by three. Never mind the hardwood floor. The severing fibers release small tweaky noises, like the muted yelps of outraged Persian weavers. Never mind the

weavers. When we’re finished cutting, we measure the individual pieces, total them up—and find that, lo, there’s still nearly 216 square feet of recognizably carpetlike stuff. But what does it amount to? Have we got thirty-six nice Persian throw rugs? No. All we’re left with is three dozen ragged fragments, each one worthless and commencing to come apart.

Employing as he does conversational contractions and question-answer strategy; the chatty “say”; short, punchy sentences; deliberate sentence fragments; the combination of humor and auditory imagery in the “outraged Persian weavers”; and the keeping of the reader on target via “Never mind,” Quammen makes the reader aware of the central analogy of the book: “An ecosystem is a tapestry of species and relationships. Chop away a section, isolate that section, and there arises the problem of unraveling.” We can then begin to understand why and how species become extinct.

Thus, Quammen draws the reader into nature with disarmingly unorthodox techniques that work their charm by playing on perhaps the most valuable of human proclivities: the urge to satiate curiosity. Professional communicators too would do well, occasionally, to use somewhat unorthodox methods to tap into the reader’s curiosity about how things are in any given situation.

Ron Nelson is an associate professor of English, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA 22807; +1 540 568 3755, fax +1 540 568 2983; nelsonrj@jmu.edu.

## Repurposing Content

By Elizabeth Weise Moeller

In the past I've discussed designing for the Web, search engines, choosing designers, usability, and accessibility. While preparing for a class I'm teaching this semester, I realized I had not yet covered *repurposing*: the process of converting a document created for print to Web-ready media. It is a lot more complicated than some people may lead you to believe. Tools alone cannot do this job—it requires rethinking the document's purpose and the needs of the intended audience.

### Tools Alone Aren't Enough

A Web search for *repurposing* or *republishing* shows a number of sites providing instructions for converting Quark Xpress, Adobe PageMaker, and Microsoft Word files to HTML. Based on these sites, it's very simple to just convert your print document to HTML and you've got a Web page. Unfortunately, people use Web sites differently than they use print material. Jakob Nielsen tells us that 79 percent of Web users scan Web sites (<http://www.useit.com/alertbox/whyscanning.html>). The reason for scanning instead of reading has not been proven, although Nielsen suggests that it is because reading on computer screens is tiring and slower for most people and that the Web is user-driven (if people aren't clicking on links and moving from one page to the next they do not feel productive).

Respect the differences between how print and online documents are viewed and used.

Other differences include static graphics for print, with the virtually unlimited animation potential on the Web; linear presentation for print, with complete hypertext capability on the Web; and a complicated update process for print, with an easy update process for the Web. Finally, people just use the Web for different reasons, so it is best to determine whether a document is even appropriate for the Web.

### Considerations

There are clear issues that must be considered before blindly converting a print publication to a Web page:

*Appropriateness of content for Web site*—Start by asking if this content is appropriate for your Web site.

Does it fit with your current site structure, or is it out in left field? Even items out in left field may be appropriate for your Web site but you might have to restructure your site first. Does this document help further the goals of your site?

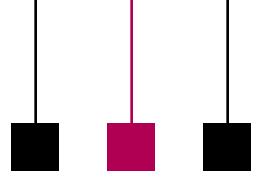
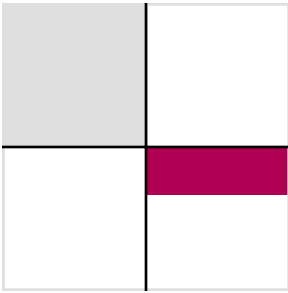
*Appropriateness for Web site audience*—Will the intended audience of your site benefit from this publication? Is it something they need? Is it something a majority of visitors will want to use? If it is a document specifically created for two or three people, you may be better off just sending them the document instead of spending the time to repurpose it.

*Appropriateness of subject matter for interactive format*—Some material just does not do well in an interactive format. Very long, explanatory documents might serve better as a PDF file that your users can print. They should not be expected to read that much text online. Documents that require a linear progression from one section to another also are not necessarily appropriate for a Web site. It is very easy to jump in and out of a Web page with office distractions. It would be easy to lose your place in something that requires linear progress through the text.

*Shelf life of content*—Will the content be around long enough to be worth spending the time repurposing it? Repurposing involves rethinking the document structure itself. Since it is not a quick conversion, is the time spent worth the life of the document? I have seen companies that have built entire site structures around a document that sits on their site for just two weeks; then the document and site structures are removed. Is the time spent on all the surrounding work worth two weeks of Web access? Or is it easier to e-mail the document in response to requests?

### Repurposing the Document

Once you have decided that it is appropriate to repurpose a document for a Web site, how do you go about doing it? There are essentially three steps: chunking, rewriting, and linking. The chunking step is where you restructure the document, rewriting is



where you convert traditional text to Web-friendly text, and linking is where you link everything together.

### Chunking

The first step is restructuring the document. It should be broken into pieces representing only one topic each. If a topic is more than a couple of Web pages of text, it should be broken into subtopics. Users do not want to read pages and pages of material online. We know from Nielsen's research that people read Web pages about 25 percent slower than print on paper, which could explain why people do not like to read large quantities of text online. Therefore, break the information into small topical chunks to create smaller Web pages.

### Rewriting

The second step is rewriting the document. Paper documents often have longer, more complicated sentence structures and use larger paragraphs. Nielsen has found that you can increase usability by 124 percent ([http://www.useit.com/alert\\_box/9710a.html](http://www.useit.com/alert_box/9710a.html)) by using the following guidelines:

- *Avoid marketing-ese*—Nielsen's research shows that people detest reading marketing-ese online. There is a strong possibility that people are at your Web site because they have seen marketing materials somewhere else and now want *more* information. Simply

reiterating the marketing language will annoy them.

- *Create concise text*—Reword your documents so that sentences are simpler. Try to use about half the usual number of words. However, be very careful when condensing. You want to avoid what Nick Usborne refers to as "dead fragments" ([http://www.clickz.com/design/write\\_onl/article.php/838871](http://www.clickz.com/design/write_onl/article.php/838871)). These are sentences that have been so sanitized that the real meaning has been removed. Based on this article, it is easy to see that Usborne is not a fan of usability experts, but he has some valid points and there is a middle ground between his ideals and Nielsen's.

Repurposing requires rethinking a document's purpose and the needs of the intended audience.

- *Create a scannable layout*—You are seeing a sample scannable layout in this column. The use of headings, italics, bold, and bullet points makes it easier for readers to find the information they are looking for.

- *Use objective language*—This is where Nielsen suggests removing the marketing-ese from your vocabulary. Try to avoid boastful and exaggerated language and focus on the facts, especially in an information-based Web site.

### Linking

The final step is linking everything together. The best way to do this is to create a site map as you are

chunking information. What pieces need to be linked from other pieces? I often find that using an organization chart format helps organize all the content pieces and makes it easy to link everything together as the site is built.

Repurposing a document is not simply choosing the Save as HTML option from your File menu. You need to respect the differences between how print and online documents are viewed and used. Once you have that understanding, it will be much easier to decide whether a document is right for both print and online reading.

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## Now This From Your Vice President

By Dan Danbom

It used to be that what people did for a living could be put into nice, neat titles such as accountant or engineer or contract killer. Then, somehow, people got the idea that such titles were too prosaic, too boring, so they began to expand them. Accountant became Director of Management Accounting and Post-due Receivables. Engineer became Manager of Mechanical Design. Contract killer became Reengineering Consultant.

Today, thanks to the explosion in the high technology field, we stand on the shore of a new wave of job titles. They put whatever you call yourself to shame.

What is the job title of someone who works with companies on brand identity? Try Notionologist. What do you get if you cross a consultant with somebody responsible for implementing his or her own advice? A Resultant.

A woman who works in a hotel on “how people feel inside a space” is not, as you might think, a coffin designer, but rather Director of Vibe. A guy with an environmental group who goes from town to town talking about environmental issues has the title Circuit Rider.

Some of these titles lack even a whiff of humility. The director of a college’s distance-learning program calls himself Keeper of the Magic. I saw a picture of him, looking smug

as all get out, and my first thought was that if I ever met him, I would ask the Keeper of the Magic if he could pull my fist out of his face.

Then there’s a woman who works in a post-production audio facility who claims the title Princess of Persuasion. You may have met her mother, Queen Convincing, or her father, King Argument II.

You have to wonder what some of these companies’ organization charts look like. You’ve got the

Keeper of the Magic at the top (I assume he truly can work magic), and then reporting to him is a Vice Wizard and a couple of Senior Conjurers. The Notionologist has under her an Impulsivist and a staff of Glimmerers. The Princess of Persuasion reigns over a Viscount of Reasons and a Duke of Benefits, and under them are a bunch of wretched serfs.

I’ll bet the Internal Revenue Service has a lot of fun when these people file their tax returns and, under occupation, someone has listed Sultan of Savvy. The IRS reads something like that and it says to them, “whacko,” and they say to the taxpayer, “audit.”

And don’t you wonder how customers deal with companies that have non-traditional job titles? It’s hard for me to see myself calling some place and saying, “The washing machine you were supposed to

deliver didn’t arrive. Put me through to the Ringmaster of Customer Outcomes.”

And the person I would be talking to would of course say, “She’s not in. May I direct your call to someone else?”

And unless I was completely familiar with the company’s organization, I would only be able to mutter something about the guy with the magic or a Resultant.

This is the problem with exotic job titles: They mean nothing to you unless you’re an exotic customer. Customers like to deal with solid, recognizable titles. When they want to buy something, they’re more likely to ask for a salesperson than a good vibe facilitator. When something goes wrong, they’re more likely to ask for a manager than a Keeper of the Magic.

I was once self-employed in a company of one and I could have given myself any title I wanted. Instead of using something hip and indecipherable, I used something familiar, solid, and just a bit lofty: vice president. But even that confused people. They’d come up to me and say, “Hey. Why aren’t you the president?”

“Too much responsibility,” I would answer.

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Exotic job titles mean nothing unless you’re an exotic employee or customer.

## More Reasons to Go to IPCC 2002

(continued from page 24)

### Microbreweries

*Northwest Wine Country* (Kathleen and Gerald Hill, 2nd ed., 2001, The Globe Pequot Press, Guilford, Connecticut) lists a variety of microbreweries in Portland. The Full Sail Brewing Company has a state-of-the-art facility on the Willamette River just south of downtown. The Bridgeport Brewing Company, Oregon's oldest brewery, also has views of the Willamette River and a nonsmoking pub. You can expect to hear the name McMenamín's as well. The McMenamín family has brewpubs in quite a few historic structures, such as the St. John's Pub in a pavilion built to commemorate the Lewis and Clark expedition.

### Performing Arts

*Northwest Best Places* (David Brewster and Stephanie Irving, 20th ed., 1993, Sasquatch Books, Seattle, Washington) directs your attention to the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall, the Center for Performing Arts, and the Portland Repertory Theater. In addition to the Oregon Symphony Orchestra, you can enjoy productions by Tygres Heart (a company of players who specialize in Shakespeare) or the Oregon Ballet Theater.

### Walks

*A Pedestrian's Portland* (Karen and Terry Whitehill, 1989, The Mountaineers, Seattle, Washington) describes 40 walks in Portland's parks and neighborhoods. Nine of these are in central Portland, where

the conference is being held. From the Washington Park Rose Garden (which may still be in bloom in September), you could enjoy the views along the way to the Pittock Mansion, an historic house museum built in 1914; or you might be inclined to wander through the arboretum and by the Japanese Garden to the World Forestry Center and Portland zoo.

### Waterfalls

*A Waterfall Lover's Guide to the Pacific Northwest* (Gregory A. Plumb, 2nd ed., 1998, The Mountaineers, Seattle, Washington) describes the Oregon side of the Columbia Gorge (less than half an hour by car from downtown) as "a haven for waterfall lovers." Of the 46 waterfalls listed, 14 are accessible by car; one of these, Multnomah Falls, was for many years the state's greatest tourist attraction.

In addition to  
brain food...

*Columbia Gorge Hikes* (Don and Roberta Lowe, 2000, Frank Amato Publications, Portland, Oregon) suggests not only the hikes to the waterfalls in the Columbia Gorge but also hiking or biking to the Sandy River Delta, where the Sandy River empties into the Columbia. Late summer is a great time to explore this area because water levels are relatively low. You'll have views up the Gorge and to Mt. Hood as you pass small lakes and mounds of blackberry vines.

### Wines

*The Gourmet's Guide to Northwest*

*Wines and Wineries* (Chuck Hill, 1998, Speed Graphics, Seattle, Washington) will take you out of downtown but not so far that you need to miss a session. Beaverton and Hillsboro are home to many high-tech companies but these western suburbs have wineries as well. In Beaverton you can visit the Cooper Mountain Vineyards or Ponzi Vineyards (the Ponzis also established the Bridgeport Brew Pub downtown). In Hillsboro you might want to visit the Oak Knoll Winery.

### Woods and Water

*Oregon—Off the Beaten Path* (Myrna Oakley, 3rd ed., 1997, The Globe Pequot Press, Old Saybrook, Connecticut) recommends going down to the river, just a few blocks from the conference hotel, and walking in Tom McCall Waterfront Park. Most mornings, you can see members of the Portland Rowing Club sculling on the river. Or you might see a sternwheeler on its periodic cruise. The Architectural Preservation Gallery gives glimpses of the past. Tryon Creek State Park near Lewis and Clark College offers hiking and bicycle trails through a Douglas fir forest.

We think the outstanding program will be inducement enough—certainly enough to convince your employer to send you to Portland to participate in IPCC 2002. And when the sessions are over and your brain is recharged, spend some time in Portland to indulge in reflections of another sort. See our Web site at <http://www.ieeepcs.org/2002/>.

# IPCC 2002 Registration Form



Please mail this form with your payment to:  
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**997 McGilchrist St SE**  
**Salem, OR 97302 USA**

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## FEES

All fees are quoted in U.S.\$	Advance* By August 15	Regular* After August 15	One-day**	Extra Proceedings
<b>IEEE PCS members</b>	\$400	\$475	\$175	\$30
<b>Nonmembers</b>	\$475	\$550	\$225	\$50
<b>Students/Retirees</b>	\$200	as above	as above	as above

\*Advance/Regular fee includes one awards luncheon ticket and one copy of the proceedings.

\*\*One-day fee includes one copy of the proceedings.

Registration fee from above table	\$
Workshop fees (see preliminary program on the Web)	\$
Banquet tickets @ \$50 each	<b>How many?</b> \$
<b>Extra</b> awards luncheon tickets @ \$25 each	<b>How many?</b> \$
<b>Extra</b> proceedings (see above table)	<b>How many?</b> \$
<b>Total payment enclosed</b>	<b>\$</b>

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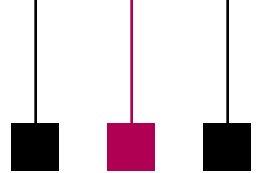
Please make checks and money orders **payable to IEEE 2002 IPCC** (All payments must be made in U.S.\$)

Credit Card Type:  Visa  Mastercard  American Express

Credit Card Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Expiration Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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For more information about registration, please see  
<http://www.ieeepcs.org/2002/Register.htm>



## More Reasons to Go to IPCC 2002

As this is being written (early March), the IPCC program committee is reviewing proposals and creating a program that, in keeping with the theme *Reflections on Communication*, will help us reflect on what we know, exercise our minds, and motivate us professionally. (More on this in the next *Newsletter*.) But maybe you need other inducements to go to Portland for IPCC 2002. What do the guidebooks offer?

### Books

*Portland Rainy Day Guide* (Katlin Smith, 1983, Solstice Press, Chronicle Books, San Francisco, California) reports on 75 bookstores. (The Yellow Pages now list well over 100.) The most famous is Powell's, which sells both new and used books from a store that covers a full city block. Annie Bloom's is more specialized, featuring women's,

children's, and Judaic sections. The Oregon Historical Society offers a complete selection of regional titles and guidebooks. The Rain Community Resource Center library houses more than 3000 volumes on appropriate technology, and the Bonneville Power Administration library has references on electrical power.

### Chocolate

*The Chocolate Lover's Guide to the Pacific Northwest* (Bobbie Hasselbring, 1999, Wordsworth Publishing, Beavercreek, Oregon) recommends the Esplanade at Riverplace, where you can get a Chocolate Sampler, which consists of eight small desserts, each with appropriate sauces. The restaurant Zefiro offers Chocolate Marjolaine—slabs of hazelnut meringue with

finely chopped hazelnuts and chocolate ganache. (Hazelnuts are one of Oregon's specialty products and you'll find them in many regional dishes.) Rimsky-Korsakoff House serves tea, coffee, and espresso drinks; their dessert specialty is mocha fudge cake. The Three Lions bakery is the place to go for European-style pastries. Both JiCava's and Moonstruck Chocolatiers offer candies of special quality.

### Flowers

A few miles south of Portland near the town of Canby is Swan Island Dahlias. The month of September is dahlia time and Swan Island then has more than 40 acres in bloom. The flowers range from small puffs to blowsy blooms the size of dinner plates, in a rainbow of colors.

*(continued on page 22)*

