

CHAPTER TEN

EDITING

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Libel

- ▶ Student newspapers are very vulnerable to libel suits. They do not have a lot of money, little experience with the law, and their publisher is sometimes the student council who either wants to sue them or shut them down. Even when university or college papers do have everything they need to expose someone on campus, the resulting court case could ruin them. That is why every student editor and writer has to learn how to defend themselves from libel suits.

You must know that:

- Anytime your newspaper publishes a libellous story you are vulnerable to being sued. The source of the libel is not important. In other words, if you quote someone, and the quoted material turns out to be false or defamatory, you could be held liable. A paper is responsible for all the material they publish.
- A reporter, editor and their employers can be sued for any libellous stories they give permission to run. That means a news editor can be sued for an article a volunteer wrote. So can the editor-in-chief, members of the publishing board and — if they are the publishers — the student council.

WHAT IS LIBEL?

A newspaper commits libel whenever they publish a false and damaging statement. It falls under the larger legal category of defamation. A defamation is any statement that lowers a person's reputation in the eyes of others — by exposing them to hatred, contempt or ridicule — or threatens their livelihood. Any false or misleading statement that appears in your newspaper can potentially land you in court. So always

remember this golden rule: your paper must be able to prove *everything* you print in a court of law.

If you call John an asshole and people laugh at him, not only did you make him cry but you made others think less of him. That, believe it or not, is libel, because you have lowered the reputation of someone in the minds of others. If you are going to be labeling people 'assholes', therefore, be damn sure you can convince a judge you are in the right.

In Quebec the civil code requires that, in addition to being true, published material be in the public interest and without malice. These requirements are not legally specified in the rest of Canada. Nevertheless, the media are bound by an ethical standard to balance each story with the public good. This means that even if an article is factually true, it may not warrant publication, e.g. a story on the disabled daughter of a student councillor may cause great pain without doing any good.

Special note on Quebec:

Any article on the CUP wire that is picked up by a Quebec paper is subject to the civil code. So if you are a writer at The Gazette in Halifax, and your story is picked up by The Campus at Bishop's University, you might be found guilty of libel if a Quebec court finds your story did not serve the public good or was written with malice.

THE FOUR DEFENCES FOR LIBEL

Truth

This is a complete defence against libel. A true statement is not vulnerable to a

lawsuit. Nevertheless, this is the most difficult defence to use. In the eyes of the court it is up to the defendant to prove the published facts are true. This means the plaintiff does not have to demonstrate a story contained false information.

To use an example, imagine your paper quoted a source who said the director of the local campus radio station was embezzling money. You have no direct proof of this, but you know this source would not lie to you. In response, the director sues your paper. In court you are unable to prove conclusively the director was taking money. If truth is your defence, you would lose this case — even though the director was in fact stealing from the radio station.

Consent

This defence asserts that the journalist got permission to publish the contested facts. To be successful, a consent defence must prove that:

- The defamed person had been informed that defamatory information would be published.
- The person knew what they were consenting to.
- The person consented to the publication of the facts. The proof of this consent must be in the form of documents, tapes or a witness.

In other words, if Joe Blake knew you were writing a story on how he embezzled money from the campus radio station, and he agreed to be interviewed for the article, and you have notes or a tape recording of the interview, than you can use the defence of consent.

Privilege

Privilege protects journalists from legal action even when defamatory mate-



2 Libel

rial has been published. This protection applies only in specific cases. Namely, privilege takes effect when a reporter is reporting on a:

a• *Legislative bodies or courts*

This includes events taking place inside Parliament Hill and provincial legislatures. Court proceedings are privileged unless they are closed to the public or are under a publication ban.

b• *Quasi-judicial body*

Royal commissions and a coroner's inquest fall into this category.

c• *Meeting*

This one is tricky. Does an official meeting of the chess club constitute privilege? Consult a lawyer to be 100 per cent sure. A student council meeting, however, is usually privileged — unless, of course, the proceedings are held in camera. Meetings held inside city hall chambers or at a school board also tend to be privileged.

d• *Public proceeding*

Again, a dicey issue. Normally, a public meeting is a gathering open to the public, lawfully convened, to discuss public matters. Thus, a press conference would not qualify. But what about free outdoor rock concert that contains speakers on social justice? Again, talk to a lawyer.

e• *Reports*

This covers any report or study that comes out a public gathering, meeting, legislative body or quasi-judicial meeting.

Limits to Privilege

Privilege *does not* apply when a journalist is covering events outside of the assembly room or meeting in question. Thus, a reporter can report on anything that occurred during a House of Commons debate without being sued, but could be hit with a libel suit for publishing information obtained during a scrum in the parliamentary lobby.

Equally, anything that occurs inside a student council meeting is protected by privilege. So if vp-external Bob Smith calls the entire student council, “a group of lying, racist fuckers,” during an official chamber meeting, you can print this without legal ramifications. If Bob runs out into the hallway, however, and makes defamatory comments, then you are no longer protected by privilege.

In addition, to use the defence of privilege a reporter must be fair, accurate and free of malice. In other word, if you report incorrect facts, or write a story with malice — a dishonest or reckless disregard for the truth — you cannot use the privilege defence.

Fair Comment

When it comes to libel, editorials and news stories are judged with different criteria. Opinion pieces — “the university’s high tuition fees are squeezing students dry” — do not have to be proven true in the same way a fact must be shown to be correct.

The fair comment defence applies to editorial pieces, be they an article or cartoon. To be successful, this defence must show that:

- The opinion is honestly held.
- The facts which the opinion is based on are true.

- The editorial comment is on an issue of public interest.

Imagine you write a very critical editorial against the administration's decision to raise tuition fees. Further suppose the piece lands you in court. To defend yourself you must show that:

- This is your honest opinion.
- The facts in your article — e.g. dollar figures and other economic statistics — are true.
- The piece addresses an issue that is important to many people, in this case students. ◀

With files from George Kalogerakis and the Canadian Press Stylebook

Basic guide to Canadian Press Style



DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN THE HOUSE STYLE

- ▶ The house style is a manual of the newspaper's preferred way to handle the mechanics of written communication — how to name, spell, capitalize, abbreviate, punctuate, and so on. At its core are two reference works — a style manual and a dictionary — to which editorial workers refer for every rule not listed in the house style. Many papers use CP style as their arbiter, but your newspaper likely follows its own traditions. Your job will be easier if everyone in the office plays by the same rules.

The house style guide will list exceptions to rules found in the core reference books. It identifies the paper's position on references to local figures and how to refer to itself, its staff members, and its own issue and volume numbers.

The house style is used by all editorial workers from the most casual part-timers to the senior editors. All of these people should be invited to challenge and expand the house style. It is to be thought of as an organic creature, which changes and grows with the staff, with the newspaper, with the language.

There are, however, some core elements of CP style which are good to know.

GENERAL CAPITALIZATION RULES

•[see Pg. 204, CP Stylebook]

- Capitalize all proper names, trade names, government departments and agencies, names of associations, companies, clubs, religions, languages, nations, races, places and addresses. Otherwise lowercase is favoured.

- However, lowercase provincial legislatures and city councils.

- Capitalize very formal titles, but only when directly preceding a name. Prime Minister Stephen Harper; Energy Minister Joe Blow. Lowercase when titles are standing alone or set off from a name with commas: the energy minister; the energy minister Joe Blow; Joe Blow, the minister of energy.

- Lowercase occupational titles and job descriptions: U of M president Eموke Szathmary; author Tom Wolfe; dean Robert O'Kell.

- Don't refer to professors as "Dr." unless the title is specially relevant to their expertise, e.g. If they're a medical doc speaking about medicine.

- In general, don't use courtesy titles like Mr, Ms, etc.

- Capitalize widely recognized descriptive geographic regions (the West, the Far North, Western Europe). Lowercase more general cases (southern Manitoba).

- Capitalize the full names of political parties, but lowercase "party" in short forms like Liberal party (Liberal Party of Canada).

- Lowercase university departments and faculties: faculty of education.

- Web on its own is a proper noun, but use website not Website or web site

- Avoid arbitrary capitalization, for example don't cap 'university' only 'University of Manitoba.'

DASHES, ELLIPSES AND COLONS

- Use an ellipsis (three periods) to indicate an omission from a text or quotation. One can be used at beginning, inside or at the end of a sentence (Except in news stories — only inside).

- Add spaces before, in-between and after ellipses (. . .) and before and after long dashes (—)

- Use long dashes (—) (make them by holding shift, option and -) to break up long sentences or sometimes instead of commas. Use short dashes (-) when hyphenating words.

- Don't use dashes next to colons, semicolons and commas.

- Use a colon, rather than a comma, to introduce a direct quotation longer than a short sentence. Use a colon when introducing lists. Do not capitalize the first letter of a sentence that follows a colon unless it is a quote or extra emphasis is desired.

- A two-word noun is not hyphenated when by itself. But in general, when it becomes descriptive, it is hyphenated. E.g., health care vs. health-care system

OTHER PUNCTUATION

- Punctuation always goes inside quotations. (Except for colons and semicolons at close of quotes). E.g. She was referring to "the most serious charge": murder.

- Use a semicolon to separate statements too closely related to stand as separate sentences.



2 Basic guide to Canadian Press Style

NUMBERS, DATES AND TIMES

- Write out numbers. Zero to nine written out, 10 and up as numerals (except in headlines). The same goes for examples like first, second, third, etc. and 10th, 11th. Make sure “th” is not in superscript. E.g. 10th not 10th.
- Times should be written 12 p.m. not 12:00 PM
- Don't write “th” on dates, so Sept. 16 not Sept. 16th.
- Write out full name of month when used by itself without specific date.
- When a sentence ends with a time (12 p.m.), an additional period must be used.
- Omit periods from currency abbreviations. E.g., \$4 US not \$4 U.S.

ITALICS

- Names of publications are italicized except the word “the”. E.g., the *Manitoban*.
- Also italicize titles of albums, books, movies and television shows but place titles of songs or art pieces in quotation marks.

HEADLINES

- In headlines and subheads, only the first word is capitalized unless there are proper names.
- Use single quotation marks when including quotes in headlines, subheads and pull quotes, not double marks.
- Make all numbers into numerals, even those under 10.
- Use % not per cent (only in headlines).

PULL QUOTES

- Include only one to three sentences in a pull quote, not whole paragraphs.

ITALICS IN GENERAL USE

- Avoid using italics when quoting someone (can use single quotes sometimes to imply what they might have said).
- Do not use for headlines, subheads and captions.

GENERAL

- Stories should not include website addresses unless they are purely meant as information for the reader. In general, do not include websites of interest groups or commercial products.
 - Refer to websites such as Google (that are company names) as Google. com, but include the www for cited reports, etc.
 - In general, names of metric units should be written out in full.
 - Names of bands or teams take singular verbs unless they end in ‘s.’ E.g., Radiohead is great. The Minnesota Wild is a boring team. BUT: The Bisons are lousy. The Weakerthans are special.
 - “It’s” is a contraction for “it is.” “Its” is possessive singular.
 - Restrain yourself to communicating one thought per sentence.
- In general, avoid using “ly” words like generally, really.

OTHER USAGE RULES

- “First Nations” and “Aboriginal Peoples” are capitalized, but aboriginal is not.
 - \$463 million not 463 million dollars.
 - 7,000 not 7000.
 - Realize and organize not realise or organise, but analyse not analyze.
 - Defence and practice not defense and practise.
 - Canadian spelling: Travelling and

cancelled not traveling and canceled.

- Separate double vowels: Co-ordinator not coordinator.
- Write “tuition fees” not simply “tuition”.
- Say doctorate or doctoral student not PhD.
- Centre not center.
- Frontline not front-line.
- Freelance.
- Deregulation not de-regulation.
- Online not on line or on-line.
- Honour and honourable but honorary not honourary
- Per cent not % or percent.
- \$447-million-a-year.
- 11-and-a-half.
- Winnipegger not Winnipeger.
- Handmade and home-made (no spaces).
- Exchange District (proper name).
- Enrol; enrolment, enrolled.
- Write dates in stories like this: Feb. 23; Nov. 5; Sept. 19. Example: The government will bring down its budget Oct. 12.
 - Abbreviate all months but March, April, May, June and July.
 - Write time of day in stories like this: 4 p.m. 3:45 a.m.
- Don't do this: seven o'clock, eight p.m.
- Write amounts of money in stories like this: \$5; \$1,000; \$2.3 million Don't do this: two thousand dollars, \$1 million dollars

- Unless you're formally and directly identifying a premier, government minister, head of state or other important official, titles are lowercase. Occupational titles like president, manager, dean, chairperson, coach and professor are never capitalized. E.g., Ralph Klein, the premier of Alberta, said the wine was tasty; York University president Lorna Marsden earns a lot of money; “Let's reduce tuition fees,” said Premier

3 Basic guide to Canadian Press Style



Frank Grimes.

- Never arbitrarily capitalize words. Don't ever do this or anything similar: The University's new building; A controversial Government program; dean of the Faculty; leader of the Party; committee Chairperson.
- Ordinary divisions of organizations are lowercase. E.g., board of governors, board of directors, finance committee, hiring panel
- Capitalize proper names of races, nationalities and peoples like this: Arab; African; First Nations; Chinese; Jewish. But: white, black, aboriginal.

GEOGRAPHY

Do this: eastern Ontario, southern Manitoba

But: the Canadian North, the South, Western nations, Eastern Europe

Abbreviate provinces and territories when they follow a place name.

B.C.	Ont.	N.S.	Nunavut
Alta.	Que.	Nfld.	Yukon
Sask.	N.B.	P.E.I.	N.W.T.
Man.			

COMPUTERS

Web site, Web page, Internet, e-mail, e-business, CD-ROM, HTML

MEASUREMENTS

In general, spell out "20 kilograms," "100 kilometres", BUT use km/h when measuring speed. ◀

Compiled by Joel Trenaman, primarily from The Canadian Press Stylebook, 12th Edition, 2002.



Grammar and punctuation rules

- ▶ Writers need to be able to write a simple sentence. Unfortunately, many student newspapers seem to think it insulting to train volunteers in the art of prose writing. Worse, editors seldom know the rules themselves enough to explain to a writer why a sentence or paragraph is awkward, let alone mark inconsistencies in style: one week the university budget is \$10-million, the next it is \$10-million dollars and the following week \$10,000,000.

Unless you are absolutely sure you have mastered every rule and exception in the English Language — what is the difference between the infinitive and the participle? — and know the Canadian Press Stylebook by heart, a review is always worth the time.

This concern for grammar and style does not have to be a form of snobbery. You should always allow for changes in general usage, dialect, slang and form. But being relaxed about rules should not be an excuse for ignoring the underlying structure of the language.

As writers, our medium is the written word. Grammar is the first level of our technique, just as still life and anatomy drawing are the prerequisites to painting and sculpting. As you improve, you can begin to construct environmental installations, but in the beginning it is best to learn how to hold the brush.

GETTING STARTED

There are countless grammar books available on the market. You should pick one, or more, and read it. As a start, however, there are some common and basic grammatical errors that appear too often in student newspapers.

Splitting the infinitive

The infinitive is the basic ‘to’ form of the verb — e.g. to dance — as opposed to the intransitive ‘dances’ or participle ‘dancing’. Do not place any words between the ‘to’ and the verb itself. It fouls up the flow of the sentence. For example, say “The staff hopes to finish cleaning the office eventually”, not, “The staff hopes to eventually finish cleaning the office.” Splitting the infinitive breaks up the verb with an awkward, and often unnecessary, modifier.

Misuse of possessives

Form the possessive singular of nouns that do not end in s or z by adding ‘s.
e.g. Steven’s dog, Susan’s cat.

The possessive of singular nouns ending in an s or z sound is usually formed by adding ‘s.

e.g. The witness’s testimony

In the case of plurals which end in s, use only an apostrophe.

e.g. The students’ house.

If the plural does not end in an s, use ‘s.
e.g. The women’s basketball team.

Singular vs. plural

A group, government, university, business or organization is a singular entity.

Right: The government said it will present a balanced budget; TalismanEnergy said its overseas operations are profitable.

Wrong: The Liberal Party said they are increasing education funding; The student union wants to reduce their expenditures.

Malapropism

Ridiculous misuse of words, usually resulting from confusion of words similar

in sound but different in meaning. For example, “She was a child progeny” or “The protestors demanded gay alliteration.”

Conjunctions

When convenient, journalism breaks grammatical rules. A good example is the common use of conjunctions to start a sentence. But, you may ask, is it correct to start a phrase with a conjunction? Or do reporters forget this rule in order to facilitate story flow. The answer is straightforward: always obey grammar rules — unless there is a good reason to do otherwise. Story flow is a good reason as it gets.

CLEAR AND CORRECT SENTENCES

To be clear and correct, a sentence must have both unity and coherence. Unity means that every part must be related to one main idea. In a coherent sentence, the parts of that idea must be worded and arranged so they link together, without any gaps or inconsistencies.

Failure to observe these two basic principles produces major errors of sentence structure. Lack of unity may result in a sentence fragment, a run-together sentence, a run-on sentence, overlapping construction or a choppy sentence.

The lack of coherence may result in misrelated words, phrases and clauses; faulty parallel structure; dangling participles or infinitives; careless shifts in tense, voice, mood, person, number; or faulty ellipses. As a result, writing can become nearly incomprehensible.



2 Grammar and punctuation rules

If you don't know what all these errors are, look them up in your grammar book. Then go through your older articles, or someone else's, and correct the grammar, just as an exercise. To understand the importance of your budding skill, play-edit a major daily.

PUNCTUATION

Commas

Many people hate and fear them. Others blithely toss them in wherever they “look” or “sound” right. Sometimes it is a matter of taste; usually it's not.

- Commas come after introductory phrases or clauses: “For example,” “After the president tendered her resignation,” etc.
- Commas go around parenthetical phrases — anything not essential to the meaning of the sentence. “Gottfried Leibniz, German mathematician and philosopher once said that . . .”

“German mathematician and philosopher” identifies Leibniz, but it's not essential to the meaning of the sentence. That means you need a comma before “German” and one after “philosopher.” Putting in one and leaving out the other won't do it. Now, turn the sentence around and you've got a different problem: “German mathematician and philosopher, Gottfried Leibniz, once said that . . . Take “Gottfried Leibniz” away and the sentence doesn't make sense. No commas.

The trick is to think about what you're actually saying in the sentence (never a bad idea, of course).

Dashes

- Dashes are a journalist's best friend. Unfortunately, they're more vague than commas; they can act as less-pretentious substitutions for colons, semi-colons, and ellipses, and are more active and inviting than a glut of commas.
- Use dashes around modifying clauses — a good way to avoid using brackets and semi-colons — or to draw attention to a subsequent orphan clause (see notes on colons

below).

- CP style calls for em dashes (shift, option, -); some papers use en dashes (shift, -). These are only two examples of dash length.

Colons

- Use to introduce a list, but only after the following; otherwise it's a sentence fragment.
- When using them in a sentence, imagine a “yes!” coming right after the colon. “CUP is awesome: (yes!)”

Grammar – How Not To

The following is a list of grammatical don'ts in sentences that violate their own parameters.

- 1• Each pronoun agrees with their antecedent.
- 2• Just between you and i, case is important.
- 3• Verbs has to agree with their subjects.
- 4• Don't write no double negatives.
- 5• Then you are writing, tenses should have been consistent.
- 6• When dangling, do not use participles.
- 7• A writer mustn't shift your point of view.
- 8• Join clauses good, like a conjunction should.
- 9• About sentence fragments.
- 10• In letters themes reports articles and stuff we use commas to keep a string of items apart.
- 11• Don't write a run-on sentence you've got to punctuate it.
- 12• Commas aren't periods, use conjunctions, separate into different sentences, comma splice is confusing.
- 13• But, don't use commas, which aren't important.
- 14• Its important to use apostrophe's correctly.
- 15• Don't abbrev.
- 16• Check to see if you any words out.
- 17• In my opinion, I think that authors, when they are writing their articles, should not get into the habit of making too much use of too many unnecessary words, which they do not really need, necessarily, in order to put their message across to the reader who they want to read their writing.
- 18• In case of commercial correspondence, cc your fax to a colleague for review in terms of jargon.
- 19• Regarding repetition, the repetition of a word really may not be effective repetition regarding that word — take for instance, Diana Ross.
- 20• As far as incomplete constructions, they are wrong.
- 21• Remember to carefully avoid being inappropriately tempted to clumsily and in a distracting way split infinitives.
- 22• Remove unnecessary parentheses (they're largely superfluous and bulky — ask yourself why an idea isn't important enough to be explained out loud, or if you're just adding unnecessary words).
- 23• Last but not least, let sleeping dogs lie and lay off old saws like clichés.



3 Grammar and punctuation rules

Semicolons

- Use to avoid comma splices; semi-colons are generally considered to be pretentious except for when linking two ideas too closely related to stand on their own or be connected by a simple comma.
- Challenge your readers by using semi-colons correctly; scorn the disuse of semi-colons for aesthetic reasons as much as their misuse (as Orwell rolls in his grave).

when they're part of the quote itself; the same goes for colons and semi-colons.

Of course, this is only a beginning. See the *CP stylebook*, *Strunk and White's The Elements of Style* and the University of Victoria English department's writing guide (<http://web.uvic.ca/wguide>) and make a copy editor happy! ◀

Ellipses

- In news writing, ellipses should only be used to indicate elapsd text in the middle of a quote.
- In other sections, ellipses can indicate trailing off — four space-dots at the end of a sentence is a much more passive cut-off than a dash —
- Blog and e-mail language tends to use ellipses as a lazy dash . . . but you know that's not right, don't you?

Hyphens

- A hyphen is not a dash. Do not use it as one.
- Compound modifiers are hyphenated. But notice how the modifiers are placed; move them and add a linking verb, and they become predicate nominatives, which are not hyphenated.

Quotation marks

- Single quotes are for headlines and cutlines and inside double quotation marks, and that's it.
- When a quote runs over two or more paragraphs, the section of the quote that ends the paragraph has no quotation marks. The sentence that begins the next paragraph does.
- Commas and periods go inside quotation marks. Question marks and exclamation points only go inside

Fact checking



- ▶ The most important part of journalism — the process that determines the credibility of the paper — your article, and you as a journalist is fact-checking. Facts are where most articles are the weakest and any laziness on the part of the journalist's part in doing research shows through to the reader.

DEFINITION: FACT CHECKING

A fact checker does not make editorial changes, but simply verifies the accuracy of content as specified by the publisher.

Fact checking is basically “re-reporting the story.” It is one of the most important processes of journalism since it maintains the integrity of the paper. Before, during, and after you have finished writing a story/article/commentary, go back and check everything that is considered a fact. A fact is anything that can be checked “externally,” which means any information that can be confirmed with several credible sources. This includes:

Nouns – names and places
Dates and times
Job titles, and duties

It also includes:

Literary quotations

Don't confuse this with a quotation that you obtain from an interview. A quotation from an interview that you personally conduct is not subject to fact-checking as long as you have proof (a recording or an email) that he/she said it. The only time you may need to fact-check an interview quotation is when within what they have said, it contains a fact such as a name or date, then you

would have to double-check it. A literary quote means anything you make reference to. Say you wanted to quote a line from a poem, book or a speech in your article. You would make sure that you have the order of words right, that the speaker/author is correctly identified and that the name of the person is spelled correctly.

Interview quotations

Interview quotations are distinct from literary quotations. Interview quotations are anything said or written by the interviewee. It is your duty as a journalist to research what they say. Don't be lazy on this point. Be sure to gather all sides to every story.

Remember that legally, there is no such thing as “off the record.” You can use anything they say in your presence.

•[See: Ch 2. Interviewing]

Statistics

Like all facts, get these straight from the original source. Don't quote a stat from an article that quotes a study, or a person using a statistic. That article may be wrong and the person may be lying. Look up the original study yourself and get the statistic.

Sequence of actions

Anything that can be confirmed with eye witnesses or backed by documentation.

Contact information

If you are mentioning any kind of websites, telephone numbers or addresses, type in the url, call the number, or look up the address in a current phonebook to make sure it is correct.

Facts must be checked thoroughly be-

fore you submit your article. Some papers also demand that facts be properly documented on a fact-checking record sheet so that editors can confirm your work.

Fact-checking example: (everything underlined is something that should be fact-checked):

*“The panel, led by Paul A. Volcker, the former Federal Reserve chairman, said that Mr. Sevan had accumulated just under \$150,000 in his New York accounts from exploiting the program and that Alexander V. Yakovlev, a procurement officer, had sought money in exchange for confidential bidding information.”**

This quotation is an example of bad journalism because the journalist paraphrased Mr. Volcker's statement. It is not a direct quotation. Therefore, it may be the opinion of the journalist in their estimation of Mr. Volcker's feeling on the situation.

HOW TO FACT-CHECK

- 1• Take your written article, and stop on every single noun, date, job title, literary quotation, statistic or action.
- 2• Make sure everything and everyone is spelled correctly and/or stated accurately. An official website, document, or in some cases of personal details (e.g. age), the source may need to confirm.
- 3• Double-check the fact with several sources when possible (budget documents against expense reports, for example). If this stage is not possible, talk to an editor and they will help you out.



2 Fact checking

4• Question everything you write. Make no assumptions. No matter how brilliant you are, your memory is not an acceptable source. Even if you live in Toronto and have spelled Toronto a thousand million times, fact-check the word again. If you are writing a news story and it mentions a city intersection like Bloor and Yonge, make sure Bloor and Yonge are spelled correctly, that they are in Toronto, and that they do, in fact, intersect.

Sources:

Definition from http://www.editorsforum.org/what_do_sub_pages/definitions_fact_check.html

*Excerpt from a NYTIMES on-line article by Warren Hoge, "Panel Accuses Former

U.N.Aide of Bribe Scheme," August 9, 2005
<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/09/international/middleeast/09food>.

Example fact-checking sheet to have writers submit with articles

Writer Info:

Name: _____ Phone: _____ E-Mail: _____ Date: _____

Issue #: _____ Article Section: News / Opinions / Features / Arts / Sports / Other

Complete the following process for every source that you use in your article. You must hand this in with your article. Articles submitted without fact-checking sheets completed will not be considered for publication. Make sure to confirm the spelling of everything so when we try to fact check it on the internet it is easy to find.

We must be able to confirm the spelling of names, dates, times, stats, etc. as explained above or we will look extremely unprofessional and may even run the risk of getting sued.

Official sources are people, press releases, websites, book, research studies and whatever else you used to gain the facts in your story.

It is up to you to confirm the facts in your stories.

1. Official source:

Name: _____ Phone: _____ E-Mail: _____

Repeat this for every source. This schematic is an example of the information necessary for your article to be considered factual. For sources such as books, press releases, online articles, etc. cite them so we can find them easily. (use MLA style)

Submitted by the Underground

Editing for editors



- ▶ People do not read a university or college publication the way a professor grades an essay. Students read their campus papers in a busy cafeteria with the buzz of conversation around them, on a noisy bus while commuting to and from school, or when a teacher is boring them in a lecture.

New writers often have difficulty understanding this, and insist on writing long, convoluted pieces that would take a linguist to decipher. They may have an important story to tell, but if readers skip the article to move on to more easily digested material, then what is the point?

The biggest battle that most student papers have to win is the respect of their audiences. Readers must believe that what you print is accurate. Moreover, they have to be able to follow every story. If you misspell the name of your university president, or establish a reputation for getting facts wrong, your credibility will crumble.

This is where editors come in. As an editor, your job is to make sure every story is clear, tight and accurate. This process has two parts: copyediting and proofreading. Ideally, a different person should do each job. Let us tackle each part separately.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Editing refers to the main revision work on an article. This includes everything from fact checking, restructuring a lede, rewriting sections and asking a writer to rework a story. Any copyeditor should have as many of the following on hand as possible:

A binder of local style notes

Inconsistency implies inaccuracy in the minds of many readers. So make a list of style rules that your newspaper staff and editorial board have agreed to.

Will it be 'says' or 'said' after a quote? Punctuation inside or outside quotation marks? British or US (or Canadian!) spelling? Assistant vice-president (planning) or Assistant Vice President of Planning? As the year progresses, and you encounter more style points, write them down and keep them in a binder.

Canadian Press Stylebook and Canadian Press Caps and Spellings

The CP Stylebook, which contains more than 450 pages, and the small but invaluable *CP Caps and Spellings* manual, are the bibles of Canadian journalism. The *CP Stylebook* has a rule for any situation you can imagine, from when to capitalize titles, to the proper spelling of measurements.

If your paper's stylebook does not cover a certain rule — e.g. how do I call someone from Burkina Faso? Answer: Burkina Fasan — use the *CP Stylebook*. Not sure how to spell Mao Tse-tung? Check the *CP Caps and Spellings*.

Note: Shy away from the Globe and Mail style guide or other individual newspaper stylebooks. These manuals are not standards and deviate from the norm.

At least one good dictionary

But be careful not to have a British dictionary if you are using US spellings, and vice-versa.

A telephone book, university phone book and students' phone book

These resources are invaluable when you want to confirm a fact, double-

Editing checklist

- Check dates, numbers, names, titles, facts and statistics.
- Check for anachronisms, wrong allusions, contradictions and errors of fact.
- Check quoted material for accuracy. When in doubt, call the editor or writer before the source.
- Check for plagiarism and other copyright infringement, hoax, fraud, libel.
- Check that all errors from previous proof copy have been incorporated in current proof.
- Proof captions and check that they make sense with their photos.
- Check placement of tables and graphs.
- Check photograph and illustration credits.
- Check callouts.
- Check alignment of copy.
- Check for widows and orphans (words floating all by themselves on a page).
- Flag all possible graphic problems for designer (keylines out of place, etc.).
- Proof all ad copy.
- Check accuracy of all authors' names.

check a spelling or make sure you have someone's proper title. Online directories are even better.

A campus map and city map

Is it Stephan's Central Library, or Central Stephen's Library? At four in the morning, when the eyes are tired, a map with location names is a godsend.

Files of current issues and sources

Make sure that back issues, story files, old notepads, clips from local commercial papers, university documents, copies of administration papers and any other relevant documents are stored in an easy to locate storage space.

<continued...>



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ACCURACY

Do not trust anything. Check the spelling of people's names and titles, using the resources listed above. Check the facts in a story. Often this is as simple as turning to the writer and asking them if they checked it themselves, and if yes, how.

Check dates — when does yesterday refer to? Question quotes if they seem too perfect or outrageous. If a quote seems strange, ask the reporter where they got it. Is it written down in a notebook? Is it on tape? And if you hesitate for even a moment over a word check the dictionary.

Finally, try to edit a story with the writer present. If this is not possible, make sure you can reach the reporter if you have any questions. It is crucial that you maintain as much contact with a writer as possible.

COPY EDITING

Your copy has made it through the line editing stage. Line editors often copy edit, and copyeditors sometimes line edit. Regardless of your role at the paper, you should be looking for the most basic and embarrassing errors.

PROOFREADING

Proofreading refers to the process that occurs after a line or section editor has finished substantively changing an article. A proofreader is responsible for making sure no grammatical errors, spelling mistakes, layout problems or flaws appear in the story.

Proofreading is a time-consuming task and requires concentration. So do not try to do this in the middle of an argument, with the music blasting or after the production night sherry has been opened.

Make sure your office has a good dictionary and style guide. Once you have chosen a reference book, however, stick with it. If you do not, you will waste time each week trying to remember what you decided the week before.

Most papers proofread on printouts when the paper is first laid out; others do it all digitally. Remember if there are lots of corrections and additions, the length of the story may be changed.

The best way to work is systematically. There are many things to look for, so allow time to read the article three times.

First read for coherence, correct words — spell-checking programs won't catch the wrong word if it is spelled correctly — and production style. The person typing may have left out a paragraph or accidentally shuffled some. Is the author's name spelled correctly? Is the article in the right font? These are the sorts of questions to answer on the first read.

The second time read the article backwards. This forces you to focus on the spelling of each word. Fast readers do not really see the words when they read so the point is to read each letter of each word. Also look for grammar. Check that quotes begin and end, and that they have proper punctuation.

The third read is for style. Check capitalization and details like titles. For example, does your paper put a period af-

ter 'Ms' or do you omit unearned titles totally? Do initials get a period and a space, a space or a period? Also make sure that names and titles are spelled correctly and consistently.

CONCISION

Every writer and editor should study the following rules, taken from George Orwell's classic essay "Politics and the English Language."

- Never use a long word where a short one will do.
- Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech that you are used to seeing in print.
- If it is possible to cut a word out, cut it.
- Never use the passive when you can use the active.
- Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an alternative.
- Break any of these rules sooner than write anything outright barbarous.

In news writing, short, clear, declarative phrases are key. The reason for this is simple: readers will not read confusing sentences. So examine each sentence by itself and ask if it can be written in a shorter way without changing the meaning. If the answer is "yes," cut out the unnecessary words.

At this point, an arts editor may argue that terse sentences are rooted in a news-focused bias. Culture writing, after all, flourishes with descriptive passages, and intricate description is difficult if you limit yourself to short phrases. But the point here is not to become a robot that always produces tight sen-



2 Editing for editors

tences. The point, rather, is to aim for clarity, and clarity is attained through focused writing. This means that every word you use must count.

In news, this translates into short, factual statements. In arts, where there is more flexibility, one has the option of writing longer sentences with more colour.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that culture stories can be long-winded screams. Like a news story, an arts piece serves its purpose only when someone reads it, and a reader will only read something if they can follow the writer.

GRAMMAR

Remember to make sure that you always check the following in a story.

- Are the tenses consistent?
 - Does the article contain spelling mistakes?
 - Does the writer always use the active voice?
- [See: Ch 9. Grammar and punctuation]

LINE EDITING

Finding story flow

An article is like a jigsaw puzzle, where the lede, quotes and background information come together to produce a complete picture. Too often, however, editors receive stories in a jumbled mess. The lede does not make sense, context is missing, quotes are redundant and the statistics are wrong. What do you do? The answer is simple: find clarity.

As an editor, your job is to put the dif-

ferent parts of the jigsaw puzzle together. To achieve this goal, you must have a clear idea of what picture you are creating before you start editing. In other words, when a writer comes in with a confusing piece, or you are struggling during an edit, ask this question, “In one sentence, what is this article about?” If you, or the writer, cannot come up with this sentence, chances are the story is not a story but rather an idea without focus.

The distinction between a story and an unfocused idea is crucial. A story deals with an issue by describing something, be it an event or topic. An article on pay equity, for instance, might describe how women professors earn less than their male counterparts. An unfocused idea, on the other hand, raises an issue without answering it.

Before you start editing a piece, make sure you understand what the story is about. The lede will revolve around this story-thesis. From then on, the article builds on what appeared in the lede.

Watch for context and background

Look for holes in logic. Watch for oversensationalism and under-sensationalism. Is something outrageous being presented in a bland fashion? Is something fairly routine made to sound like the apocalypse?

Read the piece over once and make a mental list of questions for the reporter — things that need to be checked, things you really do not understand and things you think should be in the story but are not. Get questions answered and muddy passages reworked — preferably by the reporter.

Now, do a second edit. Is the lede ac-

curate, or could it be restated in a more effective way? Do the paragraphs that follow flow logically, or should some be moved up or down? Are important pieces of information buried near the bottom? Are nasty things said about people or institutions backed up, and have they had a chance to respond?

Is anything missing? Does the article take for granted that readers possess pieces of information they probably do not know? Is there a historical context to the story, whether it is last week or ten years ago? Does the story tell readers why they should care?

Now, do a final edit. Boil the story down. Examine each sentence. Is it as short and effective as it could be? Examine each word as well, in isolation. Is it spelled correctly?

It sounds like all this will take hours per story, and at first it might. But given practice a lot of it becomes almost automatic. You must train your eye to read words letter by letter, and your brain to question everything it registers as you read.

ENDNOTES

Editing is largely a process of building up a list of questions you automatically ask yourself as you go through a story. It's also a matter of listening to your inner voice, the one that hesitates briefly at a word or statement. Ignore it at your peril. If something gives you even a millisecond's pause, stop and re-examine the passage. Trust your instincts.

Editing also calls on all the diplomatic skills you possess. The best reporters know they can learn from a good edit



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and rarely kick up a fuss. Other people, however, must have their egos massaged. Try to work from the bottom up when editing with a reporter. Nothing raises their hackles faster than saying off the top, “your lede sucks.” Deal with the fiddly stuff first, then move to the big questions. Use the ‘two stars and a wish’ method — tell them what they did well and *then* what they can do better.

Always encourage reporters to rework passages themselves, keeping in mind what you have suggested. They will learn, you will do less work and they will be happier.

At the end, the story should read better than when it was handed in, and it probably should not be the same length. It will either be shorter, because you made it tighter by removing superfluous words, or longer because you have added context and background.

Finally, when you become a proficient editor, you must resist the temptation to rewrite each story so that it sounds exactly the same. Writers learn the most when they are beginning and are edited heavily, but you have got to ease off when their work improves.

PRINTOUTS

Print your corrections clearly. If the people entering the corrections cannot read your handwriting, you will end up adding mistakes rather than fixing them. After the corrections come back, make sure they go through the same process as the copy. Corrections are also prone to mistakes.

After everything has been laid out on the flat, it should be proofread again.

This time you are looking for production as well as editorial mistakes.

Again go through the page systematically. First, all the copy gets another read. Stories can be cut off before the end, or the wrong file could have been attached.

Next check the captions. Have you followed the production style for the paper? Do they fill the space? Are they in the right size and type? If they run short of space, do they get placed on the right, left or in the centre? Do all the graphics have a credit? Are all pieces of artwork boxed?

Now look at the headlines. These have a tendency not to get proofread so make sure they get checked now. Nothing looks sillier than a 42 pt spelling error. Are they in the right font? Are they right, left or centered? Are they on the right story? Do they fit the story? Also check the spelling of the writers' names at this time. Most of our volunteers are in this for the glory so get their names right.

Finally, check the other things on the page. Is the page number right? Is the date right? Is the folio on straight? Is the running head right, left or centered? Is it straight? Will anything fall off the page?

You may wish to make a checklist for checking a page. Since this work is generally done late at night or in the early morning it is doubly important to have a system to follow.

ROLE OF AN EDITOR

It is essential for the editor-in-chief/coordinating editor to watch over the entire editorial process. This is where

editorial presence is felt.

The editor is concerned with overall tone and “feel” in the context of the newspaper’s mission and editorial mandate. They consider how the individual pieces, and their order and physical arrangement on the page, contribute to that mandate.

They edit and arrange for thoroughness, variety, balance and order. As well, the editor checks the selection and placement of graphics and fillers, and imagines the response of the paper’s readership.

BEING A CONSTRUCTIVE EDITOR

A constructive editor is someone who both improves copy and lets a writer’s individual style shine through. Writers should never edit themselves. They should have free reign with their creativity and words, but editors have the right to bring them back to earth.

A good editor:

- Edits for the newspaper’s style.
- Explains to a writer why they have made the editorial changes that they have.
- Makes suggestions beforehand on how to nationalize or localize a story.
- Asks a writer to make changes when the copy is only halfway to being printed.
- Suggests angles, but never dominates them.
- Constantly encourages writers. ◀

With files from Ian Jack, Mandy Grave, Shelley Robinson and Mary Vallis.



Editing a lede into a story

- ▶ If you do not know what a lede is, or are oblivious to different types of ledes, stop here. First rule: you cannot edit something you do not understand. Go read lede writing in chapter one and then come back.

Editing a lede is both the first and last thing you should edit in any story. The first because it sets the tone for what is to come; without the structure of a solid lede the reader does not know what the point of the story is.

It is also the last thing to edit because the rest of the story needs to be tight enough to make the lede logical. It also has to keep flowing with your edits. If

you changed the story significantly, equally significant lede re-writing will need to happen.

You have two goals with a lede: to suck the reader in and to be accurate. Never lose sight of either.

The best way to edit a lede is to not have to. A good lede comes out of a writer's grasp of what the real story is and how to hook readers.

Inexperienced writers will have trouble with this, but you can help as an editor. If you go over what you are looking for when you first assign a story and give tips, you are already ahead of the game.

It will help their ledes get progressively better. Do not send an inexperienced reporter to a council meeting with a vague assignment and expect gems

The next best way is to edit the story, or at least the lede, with the writer. Before you even look at the story ask the writer what happened.

Chances are that with a little bit of refining their answer is the lede. If they say "I dunno," either they are shy or you have bigger problems than just the first paragraph. Often what they will tell you will either be buried further down or not even in the story — bring it up or add it in.

Tips for editing ledes

- 1• Never edit an anecdotal lede into a story. [This rule can be waived if you are either moving up existing descriptive detail or working with the writer to suss out some detail.] You were not there so you are almost sure to mess it up.
- 2• Never edit a lede into a story you have not read all the way through. Do not laugh, it happens. It is late, you are tired, you figger you know what it is about. The pitfalls should be obvious.
- 3• Make the lede appropriate to the story. This includes not sensationalizing some minor detail or, if the reporting isn't there to support it, playing up an under represented angle within the story. This rule applies even if the detail is the better or "real" story and what you have in front of you is deadly dull. Either reassign it and wait for the next issue, or suck it up and do what you can.
- 4• Never have an acronym in the lede. Never. If you do not explain it someone is sure to miss the meaning and either remain confused or flip the page. If you bracket it behind the title [BIBTT] you are bulking the lede up and letting the reader know early on it is one of those boring and hard-to-follow stories with all the acronyms. Even in the body of the text try to use a general term like "the council", "the association" or "the mob" instead of the acronym.
- 5• Never have a date in your lede. The story is rarely about when something happened but what happened. Hit them with the date later.
- 6• Try to keep ledes under 35 words.
- 7• Avoid crazy-large official titles and generalize until the second reference. So do not run, "Tuition should be free, says Oronde Walker, president of the University of Alberta's Student Society's Bermuda Triangle Association." Edit in instead, "Tuition should be free says a student leader."
- 8• Keep your eyes open for buried ledes. The real story is often four paragraphs down. Pull it up and restructure the rest of the story accordingly.
- 9• Do not use question, cosmic or quote ledes. And make sure none of your writers do either.
- 10• Post good and bad ledes around the office. From any paper. Discuss what makes them powerful or repugnant, and remember to praise any good ledes in your own paper.



2 Editing a lede into a story

The most common way people end up editing is late at night, with no hope of reaching the writer on a tight deadline. Restructuring as little possible while still giving yourself the opportunity to rewrite it. You do not know the details of the story and they are not necessarily all in there. If you change the lede too much it may not fit anymore or will end up being wrong. Stick to facts that are in the story.

That being said, if the lede is something along the lines of “On Saturday January 3, 2007, students and faculty alike gathered at the Quinpool Club to hear the musical stylings of . . .” feel free to rewrite at will.

The two types of ledes most commonly written by new reporters are cosmic ledes and essay ledes. Neither is very catchy. Cosmic ledes attempt to set some sort of universal tone. They often suffer from trying to be too clever. Here is an example:

What can students needing job advice do? Go to the university job employment office — unless you're an arts student.

It would be much better to get to the meat of the story by starting with:

The university's new job employment office is coming under fire from student leaders for what they say is its bias against arts students.

Essay ledes start at the beginning, are usually boring and are also mammoth paragraphs. Take this lede:

On Monday, Sept. 24 the petty cash committee of the Dalhousie Student Union (DSU) met in the council cham-

bers to discuss a number of items including the purchase of three new ashtrays.

Five hundred words later you will find something like, “Council member Dzifa Awuno-Akaba says she didn't think spending more money was a good idea since the council had to make up for the \$10,000 recently discovered stolen.”

Move the stolen money up to the lede, but be careful. If that is the only reference, and all the rest of the story is about the ashtray debate, your stolen money lede would be false advertising.

Get some extra reporting on the stolen money angle, or if you have to run it as is, make it the most interesting story about ashtrays you can manage without gutting the original.

The favourite lede of semi-experienced reporters is the anecdotal lede, first cousin to the dreaded quote lede. Use your judgment, but too many can get clichéd. If there is room for a hard news angle use it. Save the feature type lede for the more in-depth, or less immediate, story.

Ultimately, the best way to learn how to write, or edit, good ledes is by practice and reading good ones. ◀

With files from Ian Jack, Mandy Grave, Shelley Robinson and Mary Vallis



Headlines and cutlines

BY MIKE ORSINI AND CARL WILSON

▶ GOOD HEADS

- a• Summarize the content of the story.
- b• Entice the reader into reading the story.
- c• Anchor the story design to help visually organize the page.

BAD HEADS

- a• Miss the point of the story.
- b• Are so confusing, the reader doesn't bother to read the story.
- c• Disturb the design of the page.

Besides understanding the story thoroughly, headline writers must remember that the reader hasn't read the story and perhaps never will.

Sly references to story content won't work. If you're stuck for a headline, always ask yourself this question: "What is the one thing that this story wants the reader to know?"

Make that one thing the headline. It's a sure way to arrest attention, and even if someone just scans the headline and skips the story, at least you've communicated something to them.

Too often, headline writing is the last stage of production. While actually sizing the headlines often must come last, there's no reason not to get ideas in advance.

Leave a space for headline suggestions on your copy lists. Encourage writers to include two or three possible heads at the top of their files or establish a rule that copy editors must come up with a headline for each story during the editing process.

These exercises teach headline writing skills to more people, and allow you to distribute the load, resulting in only minor adjustments by the time you're too bleary-eyed to be creative.

Be creative. A paper full of dull headlines looks like a paper full of dull stories. While not every story suits irreverence, and too much of a good thing is, well, too much, headlines should have some sparkle or punch.

The temptation, unfortunately, is to write cutesy headlines. Everyone has written their share of headlines that were understood by one person: themselves. Headlines are not supposed to be inside jokes. Always be imaginative, but write "fun" headlines only when both the story and your sense of humour warrant it.

However, imaginative does not mean tasteless. Consider the headline that appeared above a story in a British tabloid. The story was about a maniac who ran into a laundromat, raped some of the customers, and took off. The headline: "Nut screws washers, and bolts."

Sometimes being imaginative can also land you in court. A headline above a story I had written about alleged sexual discrimination at Montreal music shop Sam the Record Man read: "Sam the Sexual Harassment Man."

That one was downright libellous. Sam's had never been convicted of harassing its female employees, as was clearly stated in the story, but the headline-maker hung him anyway.

The lesson in this? Headline writers should read stories carefully, with their brains switched on. A fair and balanced

story with a libellous headline can still land you in court. (Fortunately, we were not sued, despite several threats.)

As a headline writer, you are also expected to be a walking thesaurus. Not only do you have to find synonyms, but synonyms that will fit in the allotted space for a headline. Try exercises on yourself or with a fellow staffer. Can you come up with five synonyms for the word "inaugurate"? How about "prohibit"?

Or try "word association football" — bat words back and forth with a partner, using puns, double meanings and cognitive associations to form the chains. Go as fast as possible. (Eg., "Black," "White," "Hat," "Cowboy," "Horse," "Throat," "Deep," "Sea," "Cement Galoshes," "Hoffa," "Half A Loaf," "Better Than None," "Priest". . .) These games are a good warm-up to actual headline-writing.

CUTLINES

Cutlines are similar to headlines in methodology, but the stakes, like the type, are a little smaller. You'll have to be aggressively stupid to draw attention to a bad cutline. On the other hand, you'll have to be a bit more clever to make a cutline do its job.

Cutlines (the descriptions which hover beneath photographs and, sometimes, graphics) should be judged on either information value or wit. The ideal cutline will have both. It will:

- 1• Identify the image and give it a context, either by naming the people, pinpointing the locale or clarifying the situation.



2 Headlines and cutlines

- 2• Tell the reader something they don't know, especially something the story doesn't tell them.
- 3• Motivate the reader to read the accompanying story, if there is one.
- 4• Reinforce the angle and tone of the story with subtle shades of phraseology.
- 5• Leave a little gold nugget of wit or wisdom at the base of the reader's hippocampus.
- 6• Be as short as possible to make the point but as long as necessary to fit the space.

So, for example, how about a cutline for a picture of someone sitting in a wheelchair in the snow at the foot of a staircase, to go with a story about accessibility and budget cuts?

“Spring flooding may float St. FX. student Susan Ravishad into the library by exams, but the university won't float the cash to provide her with a ramp.”

Or whatever. But “Wanna buy a ramp?” or “Physically-challenged Sue Ravishad” won't do. They sound as cryptic as fortune cookies. Cutlines can suffer from the same faults as headlines, by being awkward, confusing, pointless or libellous.

Warning: cutlines attract libel even more magnetically than heads do. For instance, at a university a couple of years ago, a student councillor introduced a motion which censured the animal-rights movement as racist, because fur trapping is essential to many First Nations people's traditional economies and lifestyles.

The campus paper wrote a story featuring interviews with the councillor and a campus anti-fur activist, which was to be illustrated with headshots of the two antagonists. And the cutlines nearly read “Activist Amos: A credit to his species” and “Councillor Pete:” (who was white) “A credit to his race.”

Luckily, cooler minds prevailed. So there are limits, if you want to preserve your hide.

That said, here are a few tricks for gen-

erating better cutlines:

- If you have a great photo and a lousy story, or no time to write one, it can be effective to box the photo and cutline together, and use the cutline as a news brief.
- Get photographers to include cutlines with their prints.
- Pull a line from the story, or one that didn't fit into the story, and put it under a picture that illustrates it or

Fixing common head/cutline flaws

- 1• Cut dense, unclear phrases or gratuitous adjectives.
- 2• Correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
- 3• Replace abstract words with specifics.
- 4• Replace weak or passive verbs with strong, active ones.
- 5• Read aloud head/cutline and lede for tone compatibility.
- 6• Cut clutter by narrowing focus.
- 7• Cut overused puns, failed jokes, clichés.
- 8• Make sure head/cutline and lede aren't redundant.
- 9• Replace jargon and ellipses with simpler paraphrases.
- 10• Paraphrase abbreviations and acronyms.
- 11• Cut excessive possessives and prepositions.
- 12• Read aloud and listen for confusing double meanings.
- 13• Keep names, verbs or phrases on one line — don't split them.
- 14• Fill extra space by adding detail, not padding.
- 15• Don't use a verb as the first word in a headline, and avoid using verbs like “smashes” or “blasts” altogether.
- 16• Replace negative phrasings with positive ones — say someone is stalling rather than saying she “won't decide”.
- 17• Watch for clumsy attributions. Cut or simplify them.
- 18• Replace obscure names or references with description.
- 19• Don't use question head/cutlines more than once in a section.
- 20• Be sparing with quotations in head/cutlines.
- 21• Ask yourself if the head/cutline is in questionable taste — exactly who would be offended? Do you or don't you want to offend them?
- 22• Soften language or scrap head/cutline if potentially libellous.
- 23• Replace bludgeoning editorializing with subtler overtones.
- 24• After writing the head/cutline, scan the story again to make sure you've got the point.
- 25• Double-check with writer/editor/photographer regarding factual accuracy.



3 Headlines and cutlines

contrasts with it. With a headshot or portrait, use a quote from the person pictured.

- Cartoon-bubble dialogue, with real or fictitious quotes, looks very silly on photos and thus work well for satire.
 - Brainstorming: Put the photo at arm's length, and start describing everything in it (and everything connected with it) out loud, until you hit upon the aspect that suits your purposes. Then start blurting out phrases and variations on that theme, until the mix is just right. (This also works for headlines.)
 - If you don't get any ideas immediately, brainstorm in pairs or in threes. If you don't get great ideas quickly, especially if it's not for a prominent story or photo, dash down something factual and move along.
 - Look at the picture and read your cutline aloud. Show it to someone else. Does it give you the mood or idea you want? Does it give you any mood or idea at all? Especially if you're going to say something witty, you'd better check and make sure other people laugh. (This test is valid only before midnight. After midnight, office laughter is no longer a valid indicator of how clever you are.)
 - Never say anything the reader could figure out just by looking at the picture. If you have a picture of two men fighting, and you say, "Two men fought on campus yesterday," you insult our intelligence. What else have you got? Give names, more specific locations, the reason for the fight.
 - Never identify people in photos with just a name, except under extreme space restrictions. Append their title,
- their organization, a quote, something they've done or some salient characteristic. The cutline should draw the reader into the story by making the person look like a dynamic character, rather than labelling the person for quick disposability.
- If there's more than one person in a photo, name them from left to right. If you're only interested in one or two people in a crowd, name their locations precisely (eg., "Crystal Fitzgerald, upper-left, and her brother Nick, centre with rifle, were mobbed by irate bird-fanciers in Audubon Park on Saturday.")
 - On the other hand, again, don't insult your readers. If you have a photo of George Bush and Jesse Jackson facing off, or one man and one woman, it will be pretty obvious who's who with names alone. ◀



Editing as training

BY SUSANA BEJAR

- ▶ While all good editing focuses on style, syntax and substance, one important element of editing is typically overlooked in the heat of newspaper-making: the opportunity it creates for training new writers.

Editing is a crucial point during which a writer is confronted with criticism of their work, as well as the standards and dynamics of the newspaper. That is, if the writer is present during the edit. More often than not, in the interests of time and expediency, editors will edit alone.

There are two big mistakes that are easy to slip into while editing: re-writing the story for the writer, and/or under editing to avoid hurt feelings and discouraged recruits.

The problems with under editing are obvious. Not only does the story itself suffer, but the education and development of the staff tends to suffer too. Weak editing is inevitably understood as a sign of low standards, and engenders lazy writing habits in inexperienced writers who, whether they know it or not, probably have a lot to learn about writing for newspapers.

On the other hand, an iron-fisted edit can be just as destructive. It is often tempting to bang out a re-write of a messy story during an edit. The editor, being more experienced, knows what to change and can do it faster. But this approach has unpleasant consequences. In the short term, new writers are alienated and many never come back. In the long term, those writers who stay become nihilistic about their own writing, and oddly complacent — secure that

no matter what they churn out, the tale beneath their byline tomorrow morn will be a pretty one.

Whatever time is gained by doing the work for the writers early on, is lost as those first few unrunnable stories stretch out into a year's worth of mediocre copy.

TRAINING

So, however crazed and harried your staff may be during recruitment, scheduling proper training time is a must. For new writers, that training time might include seminars, workshops and one-on-one mentor sessions.

But in general, training writers is inseparable from the editing sessions they undergo. The question is how to use this time most effectively, which is far more difficult than memorizing your paper's style guide or spotting split infinitives.

As a rule of thumb the whole world round, the best way to teach anybody anything is to help them do it themselves. This inevitably takes longer than doing the job for them, so the very first thing to do is to make extra time for new writers. Early deadlines make this easier.

Once you have the story in your paws, resist the temptation to start editing immediately. Print out a hard copy of the piece, whip out your favourite red pen, and sit down on the couch with your writer.

Read through the story, once, without a stroke or a speech. Then go back to the beginning and mark on the page everything you would do to change the story.

Correcting a story on paper makes it a lot more obvious to the writer what you're changing and why. Computers delete, cut and paste, highlight and scroll too quickly for such communion. It gives you the opportunity to explain changes systematically, and gives the writer a chance to ask questions and follow what you are doing.

When you've finished indicating corrections — which run the gamut from story structure to sentence construction and extra research — hand the story back to the writer and ask them to go fix it. Make sure you're around to answer questions while the writer works to meet your requests.

The story you get back will likely be a lot better than the first draft. Depending on the condition of the story at that point, either begin a regular edit or go back to the red marker. Repeat this process as many times as necessary (and reasonable, of course). Twice is usually enough.

Throughout this process, be conscious of your own deportment. Blend quick perception and efficient explanations with warmth and wit. Refer frequently to stories you or other writers at the paper have written as examples and to place the whole experience in the paper's institutional context.

Listen carefully for signs of hesitation, intimidation or glee in your trainee, and move to reassure or reinforce.

As you get to know the writers, mentally prepare schedules for each of them. You should know whether you expect near-print quality copy by their third story or the fifteenth, or never. What can you do to speed their progress?

2 Editing as training



If after a few sit-down edits it still feels like you're pulling teeth, see if the kinds of stories they're writing are suited to their talents. Are they trying to write stories that are too far outside their comfort zones? See if this can be remedied through more appropriately chosen assignments.

Shyness and intimidation must be taken into account when you're sizing up new staff. Never judge a wallflower too quickly. It just may be raring to sprout. Keep your eyes open for potential.

Most people arriving at university are only beginning to explore new ideas and interests, and student papers ought to be ripe with offers.

Student papers, in fact, have to situate themselves somewhere between the social club and the sausage grinder. On one hand, there is work to be done. On the other, you have to create an attractive environment that people want to be in.

In theory the solution is simple. If the environment you create is stimulating and exciting, people will gravitate toward it. What isn't so simple is hitting upon that formula for stimulation, excitement and productivity. Give new staff the opportunity to try working in as many areas as possible. While some people will find that working for the paper isn't for them, others will find themselves permanently meshed in its fabric.

Once you have a keener on your hands, feed their interest. Pay attention to her work and let them know you are paying attention. As much as possible, take advantage of small passions to nurture

into expertise. With time, they'll even start to look at your job with little green eyes of envy and ambition. ◀

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