

# A good resolution for the SfEP

In the last issue of *Editing Matters* we carried a 'Stop press' item saying that Oxford University Press had withdrawn a contentious clause from their freelance contract. Time and lack of space prevented us from writing more. Gillian Clarke, the SfEP publications director, now explains the background and how an approach from the SfEP, a relatively small organisation, made the considerably larger OUP back down.

For some months, freelances working for OUP had been sent a contract in which one of the clauses required them to accept unlimited liability for any costs or damages resulting from errors in their work. Responding individually to their contacts at OUP got the freelances nowhere, the reply being that the company's legal advisers had insisted that the clause was essential.

“the matter had been reconsidered and the clause had been removed”

The SfEP guidance on contracts and terms & conditions ([www.sfep.org.uk/pub/bestprac/ctacs.asp](http://www.sfep.org.uk/pub/bestprac/ctacs.asp)) warns against such clauses. When FirstAssist Legal Protection was approached for advice by a number of the membership, it advised against signing the contract as it stood.

Although the Society is reluctant to get involved in disputes between freelances and their clients (or, indeed, between employees and their employers), the council responded to the concern expressed by quite a few Members and Associates by writing to Nigel Portwood, chief executive of OUP. After only a few days, he replied that the matter had been reconsidered and that the clause had been removed.

This is great news – not just for people wanting to continue (or start) working for OUP (most of whom have had an excellent relationship with the publisher) but also because it gives others something to cite when disputing similar clauses in contracts from other clients.

## Getting involved

A member has asked why the SfEP doesn't get involved more often in such 'labour relations', citing the Law Society and

the Bar Council, which do. The main reason is that they are statutory associations, governed by special rules enacted by Parliament. Trade unions, too, have to abide by certain rules (also set by Parliament) for such things as elections and taking industrial action when in dispute.

Moreover, we don't have the financial resources to take on such work – the SfEP is operated mainly by volunteers and is primarily concerned with professional issues. A number of SfEP members also belong to the NUJ. This trade union has employees who negotiate on behalf of its members on salaries, terms & conditions, disputes between freelances and clients, and so on. It does an excellent job, and the two organisations complement one another very well. □

## Countdown to Oxford!

Soon it will be time for those of us going to this year's SfEP conference to set off for Oxford.

By this time you will have decided what workshops and seminars you want to attend, and be looking forward to the Whitcombe Lecture by Angus Phillips, to hearing our after-dinner speaker David Crystal and to enjoying the entertainment that is being laid on for you. You'll have lots of opportunities to network, to meet old friends and maybe even to squeeze in some time to look at Oxford and its dreaming spires.

We're looking forward to seeing you there. If you're not able to make it this year, we'll have reports on the conference in the next issue. □

# Editing Matters

**Editor:** Hazel Reid (01368 830404, em@sfep.org.uk)

**Copy-editor and typesetter:** Rich Cutler – Helius

**Proofreader:** Rod Cuff – Word & Web (UK) Ltd

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sfep

### Chair

Sarah Price (chair@sfep.org.uk)

### Vice-chair

Wendy Toole (vicechair@sfep.org.uk)

### Company secretary

Justina Amenu (executive@sfep.org.uk)

### Finance director

Gordon Hooper (finance@sfep.org.uk)

### Communications committee

Gillian Clarke (publications@sfep.org.uk)

Nancy Duin (internet@sfep.org.uk)

Helen Stevens (marketingpr@sfep.org.uk)

### Membership committee

Sarah Patey (membership@sfep.org.uk)

Pat Baxter (reg\_dev@sfep.org.uk)

### Training and professional development committee

Catherine Booth (training@sfep.org.uk)

Gerard Hill (mentoring@sfep.org.uk)

Sara Peacock (profdev@sfep.org.uk)

(also responsible for Accreditation)

Lawrence Osborn (conference@sfep.org.uk)

### Contacting the SfEP

Information exchange: Chris Shaw (information\_exchange@sfep.org.uk)

Directory changes: Rod Cuff

(online-directory@sfep.org.uk)

General and training enquiries: Helen Martin (020 8785 5617, admin@sfep.org.uk)

Accounts: Bridget Buckle (020 8785 5619, accounts@sfep.org.uk)

Executive secretary: Justina Amenu (020 8785 5616, executive@sfep.org.uk)

SfEP, Erico House, 93–99 Upper Richmond Road, London SW15 2TG. Fax: 020 8785 5618

[www.sfep.org.uk](http://www.sfep.org.uk)

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# Brainstorming? Blue-sky thinking?



Every now and then, any group of people brought together with a common purpose tends to take a closer look at itself. It may be initiated by a member of that group or someone at the head of the group. It is a good thing to do and it airs new ideas.

The SfEP is no different. Everyone who is involved and cares about the Society wants to see it do well, to see it recognised as the place to go if you want information and advice about editing and proofreading or need someone to do some freelance work

on the proofreading or editing front.

Our council work very hard, voluntarily, to make sure that the Society operates well and, as far as possible, that it is fulfilling all its objectives and doing what it says 'on its tin'. But it also welcomes ideas and thoughts from the membership – even if those thoughts might, at times, be rather radical.

At *Editing Matters* we decided to start a new Opinion column that would provide a platform for Members and Associates to air their views and say how they would like to see the SfEP develop. You'll find our first column on page 10 where Rod Cuff – a long-term Member of the SfEP who served on the pre-council general committee and now looks after the online SfEP Directory – bravely puts his head above the parapet to tell us what he thinks. These are only his suggestions; they are not going to be adopted as policy tomorrow. But they might get us all thinking.

I hope you will respond – by writing something yourself for *Editing Matters*, sending us a letter or an email or contacting the council. We would really like to know what you think. □

Hazel Reid – Editor

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# News

## The SfEP gives an instant response

When posts on both SfEPLine and Facebook drew people's attention to a news story on the BBC website, the SfEP directors were quick to take advantage of the situation.

The BBC story reported that poor spelling is costing the UK 'millions of pounds' in lost revenue for internet businesses. An online entrepreneur, who had analysed e-commerce websites, claimed that 'a single spelling mistake can cut online sales in half'. Evidently, people mistrust websites with badly written or spelled copy, and do not go on to buy the product.

Helen Stevens, the SfEP marketing and PR director, wrote a press release, issued the day after the BBC story appeared. Headed 'Proofreaders help to protect the bottom line', the text started: 'Businesses concerned about damaging their credibility – and

their revenue – through website errors should be taking sensible precautions ...

'The Society for Editors and Proofreaders (SfEP) is urging companies to protect their online reputations by having all their web material checked thoroughly by trained proofreaders before it goes live.'

The release included a link to the SfEP Directory so that readers could see what the SfEP could provide for businesses wishing to ensure that their websites are free of errors.

Helen Stevens said: 'I saw the story on the BBC website and thought there was an SfEP "angle" there. Luckily, we were able to produce a press release fairly promptly and send it out the following day, which was no mean feat for busy volunteer directors who have other commitments.' □

invited to attend. If you cannot attend, you can contribute by completing a questionnaire or through a telephone interview. The focus groups will give publishing professionals an opportunity to share best practice and to get the views of people from across the industry.

For more details, visit <http://blog.skillset.org> or see the SfEPAnnounce message dated 13 July 2011. For focus group dates, see p16.

## New source of help

A new careers advice line to help both job seekers in publishing and those already with jobs has been launched by [bookcareers.com](http://bookcareers.com), the professional consultancy for the book and publishing industry.

The advice line, which will operate several days a week, will be staffed by career professionals, including the founder of [bookcareers.com](http://bookcareers.com), Suzanne Collier, who has worked in the industry for 25 years. By calling 0911 750 5601, people can get advice on a whole range of topics – from what a certain job might entail to what course to take to train for a particular job or explanations of unfamiliar publishing terms. Whether the caller is new to the industry or has been working in it for several years, the advice line offers help and support.

Calls cost £1 per minute from a BT line (mobile calls may cost more), and calls are expected to last from five to ten minutes. For times of operation, check on [www.bookcareers.com/careerdevelopment/careersline.html](http://www.bookcareers.com/careerdevelopment/careersline.html). □

## Shock, horror!

The Oxford University website recently caused a furore by advising against the use of the famous Oxford comma. The *Guardian* reported that Twitter was agog with the news, with one tweet asking 'Are you people insane? The Oxford comma is what separates us from the animals.'

It turned out that this new guideline was only for Oxford University internal communications and staff writing press releases. OUP was quick to reassure us that the Oxford comma lives on.

cancelled. After consulting with over 600 stakeholder groups and the banks, the council concluded that the cheque should continue.

## Publishing in focus

Skillset is updating the national occupational standards for publishing, and is looking for your assistance.

A series of focus groups will be held in September 2011 in London, Edinburgh, Belfast, Cardiff and Oxford, and members of the SfEP are

## Cheques to stay

The Payments Council announced in July that cheques will continue for as long as customers need them, and the target for possible closure of cheque clearing in 2018 has been

## Company moves and developments

Many thanks to Roger Parker for providing publishing industry developments over the past year. Roger is now shutting his reporter's

notebook. However, we are very grateful to Catherine Bywater, who has offered to take over. Catherine's first report will appear in the next issue. □

# From quill pens to XML



**Averill Buchanan** describes the tortuous business of transcribing historical manuscripts – and that's before any editing is done.

Handwritten documents – manuscripts – are an important part of our historical and cultural heritage. Preserved in private collections, archives, libraries and other repositories up and down the country, original manuscripts are valuable both as artefacts in themselves and for their content. Of course, before the invention of copying machines, transcription by hand was the only means of making duplicates of documents to be shared around. (In some cases, only copies of originals have survived, and are now valued in their own right.) Nowadays, digital photography does an excellent job of preserving the original documents, but manuscript transcription (and the art of palaeography) has a major role to play in making their content accessible in a variety of formats to a wider audience.

“so began the laborious process of transcribing by pencil”

## Laborious process

I gained my experience of manuscript transcription as a PhD student ten years ago. The subject of my research was Mary Tighe (1773–1810), an Anglo-Irish poet said to have inspired Keats, but about whom little was known. The National Library of Ireland in Dublin had held many of her manuscripts for years, but no one had bothered to look at them. At the time I didn't have a laptop, and so began the laborious process of transcribing – by pencil (manuscript reading rooms won't let you use pens) – 465 letters, three family histories, relevant excerpts from nine commonplace books, two volumes of poetry and five volumes of an unpublished novel. After each trip, I typed up the transcriptions on my PC, and later revisited the archives to check them against the originals. At first, I found it almost impossible to read Mary's handwriting, but with practice it became easier. By the time I'd finished my research, I could recognise her hand at 20 paces, and easily distinguish it from that of other members of her family and circle.

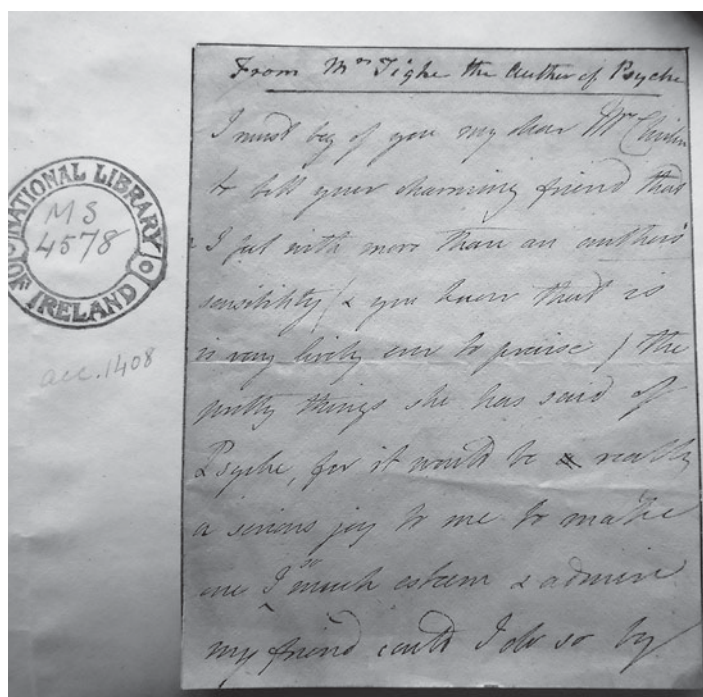
The aim of manuscript transcription is to record as faithfully as possible what you see on the page without any kind of editorial intervention. The conventions of transcription often differ from one project to the next, but it is essential to develop a set of rules and apply them consistently. So, for example, deletions are often indicated by a ~~strike through~~,

insertions by <angle brackets>, illegible letters by xxxx and best guesses of words (and transcriber's annotations) by [square brackets]. All spelling, punctuation and grammar is typed up exactly as it appears, including errors: in a transcript, *sic* is not used, but is assumed. If the manuscript is torn or creased, that too is noted in the transcription, as are illustrations or squiggles/sketches, line breaks (especially for poetry) and, sometimes, page breaks. In the case of correspondence, a note is also usually made of the address leaf and its contents – the postmark and other stamps, endorsements, the address and addressee, and the seal; if available, the paper's watermark can help with dating, in the absence of other evidence.

## Editing – or not

Only after a master transcription has been created and checked several times against the original does editing take place – if, indeed, any is to be done. Jane Austen's novels, for example, have had their spelling, punctuation and grammar regularised for publication by OUP to make the texts easier for the general public to read. But Austen scholars are fascinated by the unedited text, and the internet is the ideal environment to allow them to view and analyse it while preserving the originals for posterity ([www.janeausten.ac.uk](http://www.janeausten.ac.uk)).

Indeed, the internet is spawning some innovative ways to get large collections of manuscripts transcribed. The Transcribe Bentham project, based at University College London, has been established to crowdsource the



A letter from the National Library of Ireland (1809–10)

transcription of Jeremy Bentham's papers ([www.ucl.ac.uk/transcribe-bentham](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/transcribe-bentham)): school pupils, students and the general public can sign up, select a page of manuscript (supplied as a high-resolution photograph) and make an attempt to transcribe it. What makes this project all the more pioneering is that transcribers are also asked to XML encode their transcriptions as they go along, thereby making it easy to repurpose the text as HTML, plain text or whatever format might be needed in the future.

Manuscript transcription has certainly come a long way from the days of quill pens and paper.

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#### About the author

When she's not on Twitter or Facebook, **Averill Buchanan** works as a freelance editor and proofreader. She is also part of the team, based at Nottingham University, behind the online edition of the letters of Robert Southey ([www.rc.umd.edu/editions/southey\\_letters](http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/southey_letters)). □

# Beyond plain English

**Mike Unwalla**, who is a member of the ISTC (see the box), points out that, in technical material, plain English may not help to explain exactly what is meant.

The SfEP membership want to make text as clear as possible. Plain English is good, but not always sufficient to make text clear to all readers. Also, it does not minimise the cost of translation.

Think about the following sentence: 'The cost of each component is significant.' The sentence structure is simple, and the words are simple. For most people, the sentence is 'plain English'. However, three interpretations are possible:

- The cost of each component is large. (The cost of each component is not necessarily important.)
- The cost of each component is important. (The cost of each component is not necessarily large. Possibly, the cost is small, but millions of components are necessary.)
- The cost of each component is both large and important.

In some industries, to make text as clear as possible, organisations use a controlled language specifying grammatical structures and words. These words are selected for their clarity. One of these controlled languages is ASD Simplified Technical English ([www.asd-ste100.org](http://www.asd-ste100.org)).

## English as a second language

In the UK, many immigrants do not know English well. *Guidance for Local Authorities on Translation of Publications* explains that the UK government policy is to write in English, if practicable ([www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/translationguidance](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/translationguidance)). However, plain English does not give guidelines about how to write for people who read English as a second language. For example, multi-word verbs can cause problems: frequently, the meaning of a multi-word verb differs from the meaning of each word in the verb. In *A Study of Plain English Vocabulary and International Audiences*, Emily Thrush wrote: 'Even very advanced learners of English have not mastered these idiomatic expressions' ([www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-77497899.html](http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-77497899.html)). For example:

- 'carry out' means 'do'
- 'put up with' means 'tolerate'
- 'work out' means 'calculate'.

Editors look for inconsistent technical terms. But what do editors do about non-technical words and phrases? For example, for practical purposes, all the following phrases have the same meaning: 'from time to time', 'in some cases', 'on occasion' and 'sometimes'.

## Cost in translation

Plain English does not minimise the cost of translation. If text is translated, different words and phrases for the same thing increase the cost of translating for the following reasons:

- Sometimes, a translator must ask the writer about the meaning of different technical terms.
- Translation memory software does not always give the maximum possible benefits.

For hundreds of detailed guidelines that explain how to make text as clear as possible, I recommend *The Global English Style Guide* by John Kohl.

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#### About the author

**Mike Unwalla** writes user guides for software ([www.techscribe.co.uk](http://www.techscribe.co.uk)). He is interested in how to write text for people who read English as a second language and text that is optimised for computer translation. □

## What is the ISTC?

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators is the oldest society of its kind, with roots going back over 50 years. The ISTC sets and improves standards for communication of scientific and technical information for products, services and businesses. It also represents the interests of technical communicators, providing training, continuing professional development and conferences.

# Enhancing Word's spellchecker



Word's spellchecker is a useful tool but, **Paul Beverley** feels, it has limitations for editors and proofreaders. Paul has produced a suite of macros (available from [www.archivepub.co.uk](http://www.archivepub.co.uk)) so that your computer can do the major part of the work.

If I'm copy-editing, I first run my DocAlyse and TextAlyse macros, which provide information on the content in Word files to help me to generate a more comprehensive style sheet before I start reading. Next, I run my SpellAlyse macro. If I'm offered proofreading, I always ask for PDF files, because electronic access to the text speeds things up: I extract the text and create a Word file, then run my macros.

SpellAlyse spellchecks the text and highlights it in various colours. To start with, it highlights the main (UK or US English) spelling errors in, say, bright green. However, a lot of the spelling 'errors' are either specialist or technical words that aren't in Word's dictionary, or they are proper nouns – an awful lot of green! So, SpellAlyse changes the highlight colour of proper nouns to something less obtrusive, say light grey, which makes the real errors easier to spot.

“always ask for PDF files, because electronic access to the text speeds things up”

Obviously, if you add the technical terms to your user dictionary, then SpellAlyse won't highlight them in the first place, but, for other such words, there's an auxiliary macro: HighlightOffWord: click on the technical word, run the macro and it removes the highlighting from every occurrence of that word – it's akin to using 'Ignore all' in the normal spellchecker – so there's less unnecessary green highlighting.

If you know that your text also contains foreign words, SpellAlyse can also highlight every 'error' that is in fact a genuine word in either of two foreign languages of your choice. You choose different colours for this, which could include 'no highlighting' – again helping you to concentrate on the real errors.

While SpellAlyse is working, it can also generate a list of all the 'error' words. One possible use of this list (more on

which later) is to add some of the technical words to your dictionary: you can spellcheck the list, and, one by one, tell it to 'Add to Dictionary' the specialist words.

SpellAlyse also checks all the proper nouns to see whether any of them are suspiciously similar to other words in the text, and, if so, it also checks their frequency. The list it generates does contain some word pairs that are clearly nothing to do with one another, but some are more helpful:

Brosseau	1
Brousseau	3
Oppenheimer	24
Oppenhiemer	1
Zymanzik	14
Symanzik	20

Even without SpellAlyse, I should have spotted the Z/Symanzik anomaly but, as a non-linguist, I doubt I'd have spotted Bro(u)sseau at opposite ends of a 100,000-word book.

The other useful little tool is a macro (PDFpager) that goes through the text from PDF files and finds all the page numbers. It makes them big and bold, and adds a dotted line across the page, so that, when I'm looking at a spelling error, I can quickly and easily see which page it's on.

## Alternative spellings

Word's spellchecker is of little or no use for sorting out alternative spellings such as 'iz'/'is' words, so I've written a complementary pair of macros for highlighting all the words that need changing if the client prefers the 'is'/'ys' form to the 'iz'/'yz' form, or vice versa, and the macros even react to whether the file is in US or UK English. So, 'analyse/analyze', 'paralyse/paralyze', etc, are all taken care of for you!

And the macros also allow you to include a list of alternative spellings – focussed/focused, amid/amidst, etc – and it will highlight the ones you'll need to change.

## More convenience

Where a text contains quotations, we need to beware of using Word's spellchecker because it may change the spellings in the quotations, but with SpellAlyse you can choose to only highlight the spelling errors outside quotations. Where the errors can be changed globally, you can, for each error, run

## EditMarks BlackLining. Showing what has changed

- EditMarks BlackLining is an Adobe InDesign plugin that shows inserts and deletions in InDesign (as on this page)
- EditMarks BlackLining can be filtered by user, date or revision
- EditMarks BlackLining has all the tools you need to manage and track editorial changes in InDesign
- EditMarks BlackLining is available for InDesign CS3, CS4 and CS5 (Mac and Windows)

Kerntiff Publishing Systems Ltd [www.kerntiff.co.uk](http://www.kerntiff.co.uk) email [editmarks@btinternet.com](mailto:editmarks@btinternet.com) Tel 01202 523188

the SpellCorrection macro: correct the spelling, and the macro will change that word throughout the file. What's more, you can set the macro to alter the highlighting, so that you can tell which words have been changed.

And if you're working on a multi-file job, you could first use the MultiFileWord macro to combine all the files together into one large file – a useful resource for finding things in a book. Then, you could run SpellAlyse, and use the list of 'error' words as the basis for a FRedit script. Simply delete from the list the words you *don't* need to change, and create a correction script (and add a list of corrected proper nouns):

hemoglobin/haemoglobin  
isocetes/isosceles  
Brosseau/Brousseau  
Oppenhiemer/Oppenheimer  
Zymanzik/Symanzik

FRedit will now automatically correct all these spellings in each new file as you load it.

## A final check?

But a final question for the editors among you: when you've finished editing a document, do you then rerun the spellchecker in case you have missed any errors and/or added any? I have to confess that I never used to – it just takes too long, especially if there are loads of proper nouns that need ignoring.

I do now. I set SpellAlyse to just check the spellings and not do any of its other fancy tricks. Any green highlighting shows up my oversights – but at least I'm the one who found them, not the client!

SpellAlyse is yet another example of where macros can enable you to do a more thorough job than your competitors – and yet to do it more quickly.

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### About the author

**Paul Beverley** currently has the most enjoyable job he's had in his whole life – helping people to communicate technical information clearly, concisely and effectively. □

# The Object Browser



**Anne Waddingham** continues her series of useful tips for working with Microsoft Word.

In an idle moment, you may have noticed an odd little group of buttons below your vertical scroll bar: upwards- and downwards-pointing double arrows, with a circle between them. If you have clicked on them in a multi-page document, you will have discovered that you move up or down a page, but perhaps dismissed it as a navigation tool because you use the mouse to scroll or you hit the Page Up/Down keys.

This feature is the Object Browser, and there's more to it than a first glance suggests. If you click on the circle (the object selector), you will find an array of locations: Field, Endnote, Footnote, Comment, Section, Page, Edits, Heading, Graphic, Table. There is also Go To and Find. Mouse over them to find out which is which. If you click on one of the locations – say, Edits – then click on the double up-arrow, the cursor will jump to the last place where you made a change to the document. It will do this three times before returning to your current location. (There is an equivalent shortcut key [Shift + F5], which is quicker to use – if you can remember it!)

The Object Browser is therefore the mouse-driven way of locating the next or previous object, be it a note, comment, page, section break, etc. It's similar to using the Special menu in the Find dialogue box (*Editing Matters*, Nov/Dec 2010) but

you get slightly different options, and it's quicker because you don't have to pull down menus or switch ribbons, depending on your Word version, and it's easier than memorising a shortcut key.

Of course, you will need an instance of the object in the document to be able to find it. The objects are features that you or the author have created with the relevant tool. So, to use the Object Browser to find headings, for example, Word heading styles must have been applied: in other words, it won't find ordinary text that's been made bold to indicate a heading. You can find bold text, however, by choosing Find in the Object Browser: this opens the familiar Find dialogue box, which you then use in the normal way. Having found the first instance, you can close the dialogue box and use the browser's down/up arrows to Find Next/Previous. (Again, there is also a shortcut key equivalent – Ctrl + Page Up/Down.)

Choosing Go To from the browser options opens the Find and Replace dialogue box with the Go To tab to the fore. You have a wider choice here than in the Object Browser: Line, Bookmark, Equation and Object are the extras. Alternatively, the shortcut key to open the Go To box is Ctrl + G.

I find the Object Browser useful when dealing with Master Documents (*Editing Matters*, May/June 2011, p7), as I can jump from one subdocument to another using the section breaks that delineate them. It's also a handy way of finding things if your memory for shortcut keys is not great!

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### About the author

**Anne Waddingham** teaches the on-screen editing courses for the SfEP, and wrote the on-screen editing chapter in *Butcher's Copy-editing*. □

# Five steps towards success

A few recent queries from 'newbies' on SfEPLine prompted **Louise Harnby** to consider how she went about things when she was starting out. She now has 200 projects under her belt and a bank of regular clients. She outlines her top tips for getting freelance work.

## Step 1 – get experience with gratis work

Getting experience is the hardest part of the game, and more important when you're starting out than worrying about the price you're being paid. Publishers, who are a great source of revenue because they are in a position to offer repeat work, want to give jobs to people who don't need hand-holding. Offering free work to those small independent publishers who can't afford copy-editors/proofreaders is a very useful avenue for beefing up your CV. And don't worry about this affecting your credibility: your future paying clients won't know you worked your backside off for nothing – they'll just see what you've done. Furthermore, those clients who offer free work do so because they can't afford editing services and usually have to do it themselves; those who can afford to pay, do so because they want trained experienced professionals. The lesson here is to get the experience from the former to make yourself attractive to the latter.

“they won't know you worked your backside off for nothing”

When I started out six years ago, I did four pieces of very time-consuming gratis work for a couple of publishers and a charity, in addition to editing a parish magazine on a monthly basis. My bank account didn't see a penny, but my CV looked a great deal better, and I doubt I would have got the breaks that I did with my now paying clients if I'd not been able to demonstrate practical experience.

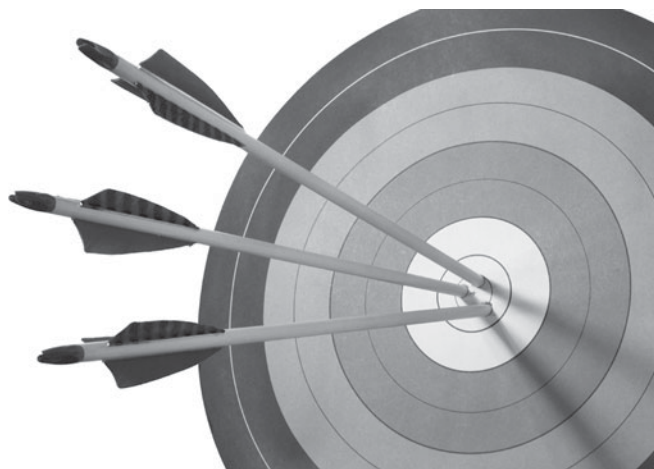
To locate smaller houses for whom you might be able to do some gratis work, visit the Independent Publishers Guild website or try cottage-industry publishers local to you.

## Step 2 – think about timing

I'd also recommend contacting publishing clients during times such as school holidays, as that's when their regular freelancers are more likely to be unavailable. I got myself work with two academic publishing houses from whom, six years later, I get monthly offers of work. This tactic means making sacrifices

### SfEP Guide

Val Rice has produced a very helpful SfEP Guide, *Starting Out: Setting up a Small Business*, which is available from the SfEP office. For details, see the SfEP website: [www.sfep.org.uk/pub/gen/br/business/sfep\\_guides.asp](http://www.sfep.org.uk/pub/gen/br/business/sfep_guides.asp).



with regard to your leisure time: in my first year I worked a lot of evenings, but it paid off because I hung onto the clients, and now I turn down jobs if the timing doesn't suit me, in the knowledge that my clients value my work enough that I won't slip off their radar if I don't want to proofread on Christmas Eve!

## Step 3 – get to the right person

Once you've got a CV with projects listed on it, you can roll this out to publishing clients. Their websites usually list who the production manager is. Once you know to whom to send your CV, buy lots of stamps! I sent my CV to 70 publishers in the beginning, and got a tiny response rate, but each of these few responses generated repeat paid work, so I wasn't disheartened by the numbers. Then, once I had more projects under my belt and a more impressive CV, I bought even more stamps and sent out my CV again to another 100 publishers. It does take time to build up a client base, and while I can see the attraction for some of having your own website or using social networking opportunities, I wanted to be more proactive and to contact the named person within an organisation who was responsible for commissioning freelancers, rather than hoping they'd come to me.

## Step 4 – focus on a type of client

I have a degree in politics and worked in the marketing department of a social science publisher for many years. I therefore chose to focus my attention on social science academic publishers when I started sending out my CV. There are thousands of publishing houses out there, so homing in on those that are likely to be interested in you is critical. I really fancied doing some fiction, but I didn't pick up my first trade client until I'd got four years' experience. So, if you're an ex-teacher, focus on educational houses; if you used to be a paralegal, try law/criminology publishers; if you've got a degree in mathematics or chemistry, consider publishers with a strong science list.

## Step 5 – SEO

One of my authors is a graphic designer/IT specialist during the week and a cage-fighter at weekends! His book was about his weekend job. He commented that he'd not come across my name before his publisher contacted him, despite his Googling, and said that if I ever wanted to attract more one-off clients using my own website, he would help me to ensure

that my website always appeared high up in the Google hit list, using SEO (search engine optimisation).

### About the author

Louise Harnby became a freelance proofreader in 2006, having completed the PTC's 'Basic proofreading by distance learning' course, with distinction. □

# Oops! Blunders I have made



**Elisabeth Rees Evans** very bravely shares some of the 'oops' moments she has had in her editing and proofreading career, and shows that she has learned valuable lessons.

## Lorem ipsum

*Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua.*

The above may look like Latin. Actually, it is gibberish. My first ever proofreading job was a book for nursing students in which the foreword used the 'Lorem ipsum' text. I assumed it was my job to proofread it, and, as I had studied Latin, I felt up to the job. After considerable time and much agony, I had to approach my client and reveal that I couldn't make sense of it. She explained that 'Lorem ipsum' is placeholder text used by typesetters, not intended to have meaning.

## Bastard enumeration

It was when I was on my fifth book, another nursing textbook for that same and, as yet, only client, that I grew uneasy about the book's title: it was what Fowler calls 'bastard enumeration'. To make things worse, it was a second edition. That week, I happened to be on a course taught by Rosemary Roberts, one of the SfEP's tutors. I brought the problem up with her. Rosemary said, solemnly, 'I see what you mean.' She also pointed out that the book, in any case, would already have been catalogued. When I returned the work to the client, 'cleverclogs me' showed off by pointing this out while saying I nevertheless knew nothing could be done. I was never offered another job by them.

## Talking to clients

Rosemary focuses in her courses on how to talk to clients. She used the analogy of a plumber who'd come to overhaul the central heating system. The plumber would say, 'Now, I've made a thorough inspection, and this is what needs to be

done and this is my estimate.' I now have the confidence to say: these are the problems, and this is what I propose to do for the fee you offer. I've never yet had a client disagree.

## Training is a business expense

Around the SfEP circuit I've heard members say they can't afford courses yet. And I've always kept my mouth shut. New businesses have initial outlay, and do not expect to enter into profit immediately: bank managers understand this. In my early years I went on all the courses available.

**"I grew uneasy about the book's title"**

Next, I'm looking forward to the Conference workshop 'Art of querying'. After 16 years in the business, an author recently resented my attempts to help. I need to know how to respond.

### About the author

Elisabeth Rees Evans studied Classics at university, then went into her girlhood ambition of nursing. After 16 years as a senior sister, it was time for a career change. □



flantoons

# How could the SfEP grow?



**Rod Cuff** starts a series of articles from readers on how they would like to see the SfEP develop. He explains his ideas, which could well stimulate debate at our forthcoming conference.

The SfEP is a very agreeable body to belong to. It's studded with friendly, helpful people, as anyone who attends its annual conference, is in a local group or reads SfEPLine regularly will know. It 'operates' well. Its successive councils have been hard-working and effective.

But the Society is not growing, is not retaining the hundreds of Associates who join each year, and has not become pre-eminent in its field. It's in danger of stagnating. How might that be changed?

**“the Society is not retaining ... Associates”**

I've been looking at membership figures in the SfEP's annual reports (see the box below). Over seven years there's been a very modest bottom-line growth and a worrying decline in full professional membership. During the year to February 2011, only around 20 Associates upgraded to full membership, and only one candidate for Accreditation was successful.

One of the SfEP's three aims is 'to encourage the use of services offered by SfEP Members and Associates', yet, for the past several years, fewer than half of SfEP subscribers have had the opportunity to make potential clients aware of their services. This surely must be related to the difficulty in retaining or upgrading Associates.

To become a dominant force in the UK's editing/proofreading world, we need to attract more entrants, retain a much greater proportion of them and push them in front of a needful clientele. I hope other writers will come up with sensible or innovative ideas on how the Society should progress in all sorts of ways, but this short article focuses on membership and visibility issues. Here are some proposals to start a debate.

## Ask Associates leaving the SfEP to complete a short but professionally developed questionnaire about their reasons

Anecdotally we may think we know the answers, but statistically we don't.

Year	2004	2009	2010	2011
Members	701	624	626	630
Associates	499	652	634	740
Total	1200	1276	1260	1370

## Rethink the position of Associates

Until we get such answers, my guess is that, for those with an aptitude for the work, the twin problems are an inability to use SfEP facilities to advertise to external clients and lack of an opportunity to demonstrate their skills.

So, a specific suggestion is to include a second search-box on the website's Directory page, accompanied by caveats to be carefully worked out. It would cover only Associates, and, moreover, only those with at least one year's standing.

The fee for an entry (the format would not necessarily mimic a normal Directory entry) would be *double* that of a Member's entry fee in the main directory, to encourage Associates to upgrade quickly and get into the latter. (As an alternative, the fee could remain as now, but the entry last for a single year.) There would be a commitment that the first hour's work for any new client offering a job of at least two hours' duration through this route would be free and returned to the client for early inspection. If the client is not satisfied with the standard, there is no further commitment on their part.

## Pay to find out who potential professional members are

- Use a researcher to run a pilot study surveying a region centred on a city or major town to identify jobs involving significant amounts of 'proofreading'. Either the holders or their employers may be susceptible to an approach from the SfEP.
- Task someone to keep a regular eye on websites listing freelances, and contact editing-related freelances to tell them more about what joining the SfEP can offer them.
- Bribe/sweet-talk publishers of books and journals to pass targeted material about the SfEP membership to all their freelances and their own editorial staff.

## Be proactive with the news media

Build relationships with journalists and news desks, so that when, for example, a 'proofreading' story arises, a journalist will call the Society to get a comment from us, before or instead of our writing a press release.

A good example of when that would probably have paid dividends for our members occurred in mid-July. A BBC website story that started 'An online entrepreneur says that poor spelling is costing the UK millions of pounds in lost revenue for internet businesses' generated 622 online responses. Our marketing and PR director Helen Stevens rushed out an excellent press release; but had a comment from the SfEP appeared in the original story, many thousands of readers (including website managers, company directors, department heads ...) would have been alerted to what we do, and there would probably have been a link to our website added to the article.

Your ideas are better, aren't they? Send them to the Editor and let us know what you think.

#### About the author

Rod Cuff joined the SfEP 15 years ago, and is an ex-committee member and SfEP webspinner. He has managed the Society's online Directory for many years. □



**Sarah Carr** extols the benefits of taking out an SfEP Directory entry.

I must admit that I'm not too hot at marketing – it's one part of being freelance that I really don't enjoy. I believe this is quite common in our profession: my (admittedly rather broad-brush) theory is that we editors and proofreaders tend towards introversion and modesty, and so find it uncomfortable – perhaps even painful – to promote ourselves and our services. My New Year's resolution for 2010 was to get over this and get out there. I joined the local Chamber of Commerce and attended its lunches, and various other networking events held by other bodies. I wouldn't say I ever got to love it, but it did get better, and I was offered a few small (and so fairly low-value) pieces of work.

I don't mean to knock business networking, which I know many people find useful and enjoyable: if it works for you, that's grand. But as 2010 wore on, it struck me that I was investing a lot of time (and some money – few events are free, and even those cost money to travel to) for quite a small return. The value of the work gained was certainly less than the outlay. Having school-aged children, I have only six hours' guaranteed peace each day for work, and so even one business lunch a week (with travel each way) took quite a chunk out of my week.

#### Splendid return

Just as I was thinking all this, I received an email from a London-based charity that had found my details in the SfEP Directory. After the usual to-ing and fro-ing with quotations, I was eventually offered an editing job worth some thousands of pounds: a rather splendid return on advertising that cost £60 for the whole year and demanded only the time to put my entry together (for which there was a helpful form anyway).

I recently came to see the Directory from the other side, when a long-term client of mine offered me a piece of work that included editing more text than I had time for. Wanting to help my client, who was clearly too busy and stressed to find and deal directly with another, and unfamiliar, editor, I

#### Suggestions welcome

The council welcomes suggestions on ways to further our aims, and will respond to those received, whether in the columns of *Editing Matters* or sent direct to the relevant director. □

## Do it directly!

decided to subcontract part of the work. SfEPLine worked its usual magic, and within minutes I had emails from two great-sounding folks. What clinched my decision on who to go with was that one had a Directory entry confirming she was an Ordinary Member, while the other, being an Associate, did not (both had websites). I know that both editors may have been equally able and experienced, but I was reassured by knowing that the first had shown evidence of competence.

#### Constant stream of offers

I haven't had huge numbers of other pieces of work through my Directory entry, and nothing else nearly as big, though some members report a constant stream of offers. If you hear of someone like this, check out their entry and see if you could learn from it in writing (or rewriting) your own (this is on my 'to do' list too). But the Directory doesn't have to bring you more than one reasonable-sized job a year before it's more than paid for itself.

**“I have only six hours' guaranteed peace each day for work”**

Of course, to be eligible for your entry, you'll need to be an Ordinary or Advanced Member. An application for Ordinary Membership may include training, completion of the SfEP mentoring scheme, experience and references, but the only mandatory component is training. I believe that many Associates already have enough points to claim Ordinary Membership: it's just a matter of setting aside some time to put together your application. Do it directly – because you (and your skills) are worth it!

#### About the author

Sarah Carr is a freelance writer, editor and proofreader, specialising in plain-English work for non-publishers ([www.carrconsultancy.co.uk](http://www.carrconsultancy.co.uk)), and has written an SfEP Guide on the subject. She joined the SfEP in 2008, and became an Advanced Member in 2010. □

# Who are the real workers?

If you've been to the SfEP's annual conference before, you will know that the real work, both behind the scenes and front-of-house, is done by the SfEP's wonderful office staff. They are real people and they work very hard. We wondered what makes them tick. For those who have already met them – and for those who are about to – here's what they said in answer to our questions.

## Helen Martin, the office manager



*What was your first job?*

At 16 I worked on the make-up counter at Woolworths.

*How long have you worked with the SfEP?*

Nine (very long) years ... only joking.

*Who would attend your fantasy dinner party?*

There are too many to write down, but I'll pick the gorgeous Hugh Jackman (Wolverine in the X-Men films).

*What is your favourite book?*

I read loads of books. My favourites are the ones that make me laugh out loud and take you away from everyday life. I am currently reading *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett (it's like the other side of *Gone with the Wind*, the maid's side of it, and really funny).

*What food or drink is always in your fridge?*

Milk and bacon and eggs.

*What situations make you lose your temper?*

Cruelty to animals, kids and the elderly.

*If you could travel back in time, where would you go?*

Jane Austen times. I'd like to stalk Mr Darcy.

*Which do you prefer – Saturday night or Sunday morning?*

Both – Saturday to party and Sunday to recover.

## Justina Amenu, the executive secretary



*What was your first job?*

Front office/sales person for an estate developer – while at university.

*How long have you worked with the SfEP?*

Three years.

*Who would attend your fantasy dinner party?*

Jesus Christ, Nelson Mandela, Oprah Winfrey, Bill Gates, Princess Diana and Mother Theresa.

*What is your favourite book?*

The Bible – full of interesting events, life stories and principles for everyday living. You can't go wrong with that.

*What food or drink is always in your fridge?*

Eggs, milk, chicken and yoghurt – got to feed the children.

*What situations make you lose your temper?*

I hardly ever lose my temper. However, I don't like being talked over and made to feel stupid, being lied to or inconsiderate people.

*If you could travel back in time, where would you go?*

Not sure really – I don't think I'd fit in any other era.

*Which do you prefer – Saturday night or Sunday morning?*

Hmmm, both really – Saturday night for relaxation and time with my family; Sunday morning for church and singing in the choir!

## Bridget Buckle, the accounts manager



*What was your first job?*

Working on a handbag stall in Luton market for some bloke called Benjy. He wanted me to bunk off school and I wouldn't (well, not to work there anyway, smoking behind the bike sheds was more my style), so I got the sack after two weeks.

*How long have you worked with the SfEP?*

Since 1 April 2003. The day my real life began.

*Who would attend your fantasy dinner party?*

Oooh, it would have to be George Michael, 'cos I love him. He promised me he will behave, but he never does.

*What is your favourite book?*

I loved *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel, as it made me laugh out loud and there were several theories as to the ending.

*What food or drink is always in your fridge?*

Food? Just drink ... beer and wine. We always have to have choccie biscuits, crisps and bananas in the house.

*What situations make you lose your temper?*

When people turn a blind eye to someone fainting, collapsing, being abused on a train or public place. When someone is trying to say something and they are being ignored. Grrr!

*If you could travel back in time, where would you go?*

To my English 'A' level in the summer of 1977 when I misread 'answer both' and I only answered one ... it still makes me cringe to think about it, and I only got a 'D'. I still misread questions, so there's no hope for me. My results came out the same day that Elvis Presley died – it was a bad day for both of us!

*Which do you prefer – Saturday night or Sunday morning?*

Saturday night, if it's a really wild one, because I know I'll feel yuk on Sunday morning! □

# Reviews

## **Oxford Modern English Grammar**

B Aarts, Oxford University Press, 2011, 448pp, £20.00 (hbk), ISBN 978 0 19 953319 0

Victoria Selwyn

Aarts describes this book as ‘influenced by ideas in theoretical work’ but having the same outlook as ‘modern descriptive reference grammars’, which take the view that ‘the grammar of a language is shaped over time by the speakers of that language, not by self-appointed individuals or learned bodies’. Accordingly, his examples are sourced from corpora. That is as it should be: gone are the days when grammarians could prescribe *ex cathedra*, backing up their pronouncements with invented examples. You can argue with the choice of corpora, and Aarts cheats a little, but, by and large, he sticks to his principles. Yet from the outset, the descriptive reference grammar proves a slippery notion. ‘You will not be told to avoid [the split infinitive] on the grounds that it is bad English’, yet ‘this does not mean that everything uttered by a speaker of English will be regarded as acceptable’: some utterances ‘violate the rules of English’.

The blurb casts its net much wider, presenting the book as ‘an invaluable reference for undergraduate and postgraduate students, and for anyone who needs a clear guide to English grammar’. Aarts himself claims that it does not assume ‘any previous knowledge of grammatical concepts’, and once you have got used to the terminology and the algebra-like strings that pepper most chapters, the concepts are well explained, with useful tables. But unless you are familiar with the terrain, you will need to read the book in a fairly linear way. The subject index is useful, provided you know what you are looking for, and I haven’t fathomed the purpose of the lexical index, while a glossary of terms might have been helpful. Other features include an excellent ‘Notes and further reading’ section and, bizarrely, an appendix of English irregular verbs.

Should you buy it? If you want an overview of English grammar and you’re prepared to read it from cover to cover, yes – but you may then find it’s not enough. If you want confirmation for your intuitions, or an authority to cite to clients, probably not.

## **The Structure of Language: An Introduction to Grammatical Analysis**

EL Pavey, Cambridge University Press, 2010, 422 pp, £24.99 (pbk), ISBN 978 0 52 173665 7

Caroline Petherick

This is uncompromisingly an academic coursebook intended to be used by linguistics students at second-year undergraduate level. Each of its chapters is followed by exercises to help the reader retain the new information, and

it is intended to be read through as a whole, not to be merely dipped into for reference.

It starts with six pages of abbreviations decoded, then, after a brief introduction, moves into the structure of words, including morphology, derivation and inflection. The third chapter analyses syntax, ie the way words pattern together in sentences; then we move on to the structure of meaning, ie semantics. This is followed by integration of syntax and semantics. We take a slight step back by analysing phrases, before moving on to an examination of complex structures, including serial verb constructions and relative clauses.

Then there’s a change of direction, in that we look at the ideational function of language, including the effects of pre-existing knowledge and presupposition. The final chapter mainly covers the way that a culture, and the evolution of a culture, affect language. The comprehensive end matter includes a (long!) list of languages, a glossary, endnotes, references and an index.

To quote part of the blurb: ‘Its combination of pragmatics, semantics, syntax and morphology into a single non-English-based model of how sentences work communicatively is innovative and successful.’

I reopen the book at random, and come across the following: ‘Intransitive location predicates have two semantic arguments but only one is a macrorole argument.’ Right now, I’ve got only the haziest idea of what that means – but hey, come the long dark evenings when I reduce my workload and I can curl up in front of roasting chestnuts, I’ll find out. Can’t wait!

## **Book noted**

### **Good Word Guide: The Fast Way to Correct English – Spelling, Punctuation, Grammar and Usage**

MH Manser, A&C Black, 2011 (7th edn), 480pp, £12.99 (pbk), ISBN 978 14081 22945

Collected together here are many of the words that appear on bits of paper pinned to my wall or collecting dust on my desk. Different ‘from’, ‘to’ or ‘than’? ‘Continual’ or ‘continuous’? I know I should know these, and that I’ll find the answer in one of my many reference books. But here they are, in one book, arranged in alphabetical order with extensive cross-referencing. This is the seventh edition of this book, and for me it has put me in seventh heaven! – Ed □

## **The SfEP review of books**

The following review from *Editing Matters*, May/June, is on the website:

- *The Professionals’ Guide to Publishing*, reviewed by Gillian Clarke. □

# SfEP round-up

## Council news

The council agreed that subscriptions would have to be increased in 2012. Subscription rates have been frozen since 2010 because of the prevailing economic situation, but it is now proposed that they should increase by about 6 per cent from next March. This rise is slightly less than the inflation that has occurred since the last increase. This proposal will be put to Members at the AGM on 25 September.

In a continuing effort to ensure that the SfEP adds to its 'green' credentials, it was decided that joining instructions for courses would in future be sent out by email rather than posted, and that receipts would be similarly emailed. A large amount of documentation that no longer needs to be kept in the SfEP office is to be sent for shredding and recycling.

The council was pleased with the response to the request in *Editing Matters* and via SfEPAnnounce for someone with HR expertise to help in an advisory capacity from time to time with HR issues encountered by the SfEP.

A new SfEP Guide on estimating and quoting for work has been suggested. It was agreed that this should

go ahead, but not until next year, as a Guide on using plain English has just been published and another on editing fiction is currently being written.

There has been an excellent response to the idea of a Legal Professional Development Day to be held in London. A total of 36 people expressed an interest, including two from outside the SfEP. The day will probably be held in November – more details to follow.

The working party on how to progress honorary membership in the future has been busy and has put forward proposals. These include restricting honorary membership to a few individuals who can, by their position or status, promote the SfEP, and the presentation of an annual award to a Member or Associate whose work has been of great benefit to the Society.

## Local demand for training

**Catherine Booth reports on a recent survey.**

The SfEP's training calendar has now been repopulated with courses for

the last four months of the year (see opposite). Keep an eye on the website for further updates, as we'll be adding to the schedule as the year goes on. In particular, you can expect to see courses heading to different venues in the north of England. This is the direct result of a recent survey conducted among our northern members.

Using the SfEP's new database to pinpoint people by postcode, I asked more than 250 SfEP Associates and Members in the north of England to complete an online survey. More than 100 people responded, with interesting results. People asked for our courses to be delivered in new areas – Leeds and Manchester were the most requested locations – and the 'On-screen editing' and 'Introduction to web editorial skills' courses were the most popular. In their comments, people said they'd like the SfEP to offer a greater number of advanced courses for experienced editors.

'Introduction to web editorial skills' was introduced as a way of progressing the skills of more experienced editors and proofreaders, and its popularity – and the results of this survey – show that this is something we could do more of. But what courses would people like to see? Development editing? Rewriting? Editing corporate communications? Drop me an email ([training@sfep.org.uk](mailto:training@sfep.org.uk)) and let me know your ideas.

## New arrivals

Welcome to the following new Associates: Helen Beckingham, Matthew Bellingham, Rachel Bennett, John Blackwell (Corporate Subscriber), Margaret Bunyard, Hilary Cadman, Ruth Carr, Eleanor Collins, Mary Crockett, Sarah Delmas, Moyra Donaldson, Judith Forshaw, Trixie Gadd, Ann Grant, Clifford Hale, Louise Harper, Lorna Hawes, William Haycock, Susie Hopper, Wilson Huntley, Wendy Jennings, Peter Kenyon, Robin Lee, Kathryn Lichti-Harriman, Jayne MacArthur, Christopher McCormick, Alexandra McKee, Sarah Newman, Hilary Perry, Andrew Praciak, Matthew Risdon, Stefania Romano, Felicity Scott, Tamar Steinitz, Rachel Stevens, Julian Thomas, Sarah Wright.

Welcome back to: Naomi Chapman, LexisNexis (Corporate Subscriber), Ian Pickett, Caroline Robins, Catherine Thompson.

Congratulations to Keryn Collins, Natalie Cutting, Michael Fariss, Angela Gardner, Nicola Handcock and Mark Johnson, who have all upgraded to Ordinary status, and to Stuart Allan, Sabine Citron, Nancy Duin, Sandra Frith, Nik Prowse and Jonathan Webley, who have all upgraded to Advanced status. □

### Training for Publishing Professionals



- Editorial distance learning courses in copy-editing, proofreading, picture research and editorial project management.
- More than 70 short publishing related courses
- Online training in grammar

[www.train4publishing.co.uk](http://www.train4publishing.co.uk)  
020 8874 2718

## SfEP training courses

### Brush up your copy-editing

19 Oct – UL, London

### Brush up your grammar

5 Oct – MH, Bristol  
25 Oct – UL, London  
7 Dec – BMA, Edinburgh

### Brush up your proofreading

27 Oct – UL, London

### Copy-editing problems

6 Dec – BMA, Edinburgh

### Editing and proofreading music

23 Nov – EH, London

### Efficient copy-editing

15 Nov – UL, London

### Getting work with non-publishers

17 Oct – TML, Glasgow  
14 Nov – UL, London  
13 Dec – YTR, York

### Going freelance and staying there

8 Nov – UL, London  
1 Dec – YTR, York

### Introduction to copy-editing

10 Oct – UL, London

22 Oct – MH, Bristol

9 Dec – BMA, Edinburgh

### Introduction to proofreading

8 Oct – MH, Bristol  
12 Oct, 7 Nov, 14 Dec – UL, London  
30 Nov – YTR, York  
8 Dec – BMA, Edinburgh

### Introduction to web editorial skills

24 Sep – St Catherine's College, Oxford  
31 Oct – UL, London  
9 Nov – BMA, Edinburgh

### On-screen editing 1

3 Oct – HC, London  
17 Nov – ETCV, Edinburgh  
28 Nov – HC, London

### On-screen editing 2

18 Nov – ETCV, Edinburgh  
29 Nov – HC, London

### Professional copy-editing

6 Dec – EH, London

### Proofreading problems

21 Nov – UL, London  
29 Nov – YTR, York

### Training for trainers

18 Oct – TML, Glasgow

All courses are described on the SfEP website ([www.sfep.org.uk](http://www.sfep.org.uk)). Bookings: SfEP General Secretary (Training), Erico House, 93–99 Upper Richmond Road, London SW15 2TG ([admin@sfep.org.uk](mailto:admin@sfep.org.uk)).

BMA – The British Medical Association, 14 Queen Street, Edinburgh EH2 1LL.  
EH – Erico House, 93–99 Upper Richmond Road, London SW15 2TG.

ETCV – Edinburgh Training and Conference Venue, 16 St Mary's Street, Edinburgh EH1 1SU.

HC – Happy Computers, Cityside House, 40 Alder Street, London E1 1EE.

MH – Mint Hotel, Temple Way, Bristol BS1 6BF.

TML – The Mitchell Library, North Street, Glasgow G3 7DN.

UL – University of London, Senate House, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU.

YTR – York Theatre Royal, St Leonard's Place, York YO1 7HD. □

Thank you to everyone who completed the survey, and who volunteered to help us to source new venues. If you live in a different area of the country and a survey drops into your inbox, I'd be very grateful if you could fill it in. The information you give us is vital for moving our training programme in the right direction.

## Editing into plain language

We are delighted to announce the publication of the sixth booklet in the SfEP Guides series: *Editing into Plain Language: Working with Non-publishers*, by Sarah Carr.

With increasing demands for clearer public- and private-sector communication, plain-language editing has much to offer to non-publishers. This Guide covers key aspects of

working as a plain-language editor, and includes training and qualifications, services and pricing, markets and tools. It will help freelance editors to command good rates of pay, and to have the satisfaction of clarifying information intended for the general public.

Trading as Carr Consultancy, Sarah has been a freelance writer, editor and proofreader since 1997. She specialises in plain-English work for non-publishers, and is an associate of the Plain Language Commission.

All the Guides (A5 format) are listed on the SfEP website and are available from the office. They cost £5 each, except that *Starting Out* is available to new Associates/Members at the reduced price of £3. See the box below for postage and packing costs.

## SfEP local groups

There have been few meetings over the summer, so we are holding reports until the next issue. □

### Buying SfEP guides

Post the SfEP office a note of which titles you want and how many of each, together with a cheque – made payable to SfEP – that will cover the cost of the guide(s) plus UK postage and packaging. The following are our current P&P rates:

1 guide: 55p	4 guides: £1.30
2 guides: 80p	5 guides: £1.55
3 guides: £1.05	6 guides: £1.80

For P&P outside the UK, please contact the office.

# Diary

**Tue 6 Sep, 2 pm Glasgow Group:** meeting. Venue to be confirmed. We'll be using our recently acquired web-editing skills to improve our local website. Contact Sabine Citron (sabine.citron@googlemail.com).

**Thu 8 Sep, 12.30 pm West Midlands Group:** meeting at the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham for the Lunchtime Special. Contact Liz Obee (lizobee@tiscali.co.uk).

**Thu 15 Sep, 11 am Exeter Group:** meeting at the Real Food Cafe on Paris Street, Exeter. All welcome. Contact Rosalind Davies (ros@yesprepress.co.uk) or Janice Teague (jan\_teague@yahoo.co.uk).

**Thu 15 Sep, 6.30 pm London Group:** meeting at the room upstairs at Trattoria Mondello, London W1. Contact Eric Smith (smith.eric@btinternet.com).

**Sep (tbc) Tayside and Fife Group:** meeting. Contact Alison Sleigh (Alison.Sleigh@trivalentediting.co.uk).

**Sep (tbc) West/North Yorkshire Group:** meeting at The Terrace Cafe Bar (upstairs), 83 Bingley Road, Saltaire, Shipley, West Yorkshire BD18 4SB. Contact Helen Stevens (helen@saltedit.co.uk).

**Tue 4 Oct, 11.30 am East of England Group:** meeting – informal lunch at the Draper's Arms, 29–31 Cowgate, Peterborough. Contact Ruth Ogden (ruth\_ogden@yahoo.co.uk).

**Tue 4 Oct, 12.30 pm Berkshire Group:** meeting at the Peacock Farm near Bracknell. Contact John Firth (johnfirth.editor@btinternet.com).

**Tue 4 Oct, 7.30 pm North West Group:** meeting at The Windmill, Knutsford, for a meal. Contact Sarah Carr (sarahcarr@carrconsultancy.co.uk).

**Wed 5 Oct, 5.30 pm Northern Ireland Group:** meeting. Venue to be confirmed. Contact Averill Buchanan (averill@averillbuchanan.com).

**Oct (tbc) East Midlands Group:** meeting. A repeat of the demonstrations of time-saving software, including ReferenceChecker and PerfectIt, held in February. Contact Nancy Boston (boston.editorial@ntlworld.com). □

# Voice from the bookshop

I rarely gnash my teeth at *Editing Matters*. Indeed, I greet each issue with keen anticipation. Topical news, diary dates and reviews are my first stop, but I linger over 'Working lives' and 'Word wrangles'.

As a newcomer to proofreading, I devour all the tips and advice that are offered so generously by experienced editors. Imagine my dismay, then, on reading an ostensibly inoffensive piece called 'Booksellers on the move', and finding that my hackles were up in an instant.

The offending words? The italics in this sentence: 'This news [the sale of Waterstone's to Russian oligarch Alexander Mamut], along with the appointment of James Daunt as the new MD, has generally been positively received as a chance for Waterstone's to renew itself, although there are those who say *people are no longer willing to pay high prices for books that they can buy more cheaply online.*'

## Waterstone's online

There are two problems with this comment. The first is the unchallenged assertion that the recommended retail price, a publisher's own price, is high, rather than the other way round, that online suppliers are undercutting the RRP. The second is that Waterstone's has, in fact, an online operation of its own, where it competes on price with other internet retailers. The message of the short paragraph in *Editing Matters*, however, is that Waterstone's only sells overpriced books and only from shops.

As the Editor, Hazel Reid, pointed out, 'there are those who say ...' is not a statement of fact. Nonetheless, as any Waterstone's employee will tell you, the subtext of reporting is what remains with the reader. Over the past year, the chain has been on the receiving end of hostile press coverage, and the attitude of customers has mirrored what they have read. It has been commonplace for 'customers' to go into shops, ask the staff for advice, look at a number of different books and then leave without either buying any books or putting them away, as often as not remarking loudly (note) that they will buy them from Amazon. The High Street bookshop has become the enemy, to be used and abused.

## The pleasures of browsing

I applaud James Daunt for his timely reminder that browsing for books is a leisure activity. Interestingly, since the journalistic tide has turned, so have customers, and many are now willing to pay the retail price – or often less, with offers – for the pleasure of dawdling among the bookshelves, handling real books, chatting to knowledgeable staff and generally absorbing the genial atmosphere of a bricks-and-mortar bookshop.

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### About the author

Charlotte Norman has worked in bookselling and publishing all her life. She now combines proofreading with working at Waterstone's in Bath. Did you know that a bookseller can walk over four miles at work on a busy day? □

## Skillset focus groups

**Focus groups for Skillset** (see p3) will be held on the following dates:

London: Tue 13 Sep, 10 am–12 pm	Belfast: Thu 22 Sep, 10 am–12 pm
London: Wed 21 Sep, 2–4 pm	Cardiff: Wed 28 Sep, 11 am–1 pm
Edinburgh: Wed 21 Sep, 1–3 pm	Oxford: Thu 29 Sep, 10.30 am–12.30 pm