

The Magazine of the Society for Editors and Proofreaders

Editing *matters*

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» Upholding editorial excellence

IS THE RISK GREATER THAN THE REWARD?

The pros and cons of the
freelance lifestyle – [p.3](#)



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| sfep

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COVER: Photo by Pete Johnson



TALK TO REAL PEOPLE

I was talking to my neighbour the other day, who has just returned from working abroad. He's been away for over six weeks, and it's good to see him back. I live and work on my own, so I depend on neighbours for the odd few minutes' chat now and then – if only to hear the sound of another living and breathing soul!

Being isolated as a result of our choices as to what we work at and where can be one of the downsides of freelancing. It's all too easy to be absorbed in work only to find that several days have passed without our seeing another person. It can be a lonely occupation – although, of course, it's also bliss, sometimes, to shut your door on the world and enjoy your own company.

A survey, and a report on the results, have been published recently by the Association of Independent Professionals and the Self-Employed. The lead article in this issue ([p.3](#)) is about that research. The report looks at the risks and rewards of freelancing – and the overall message is that working as a freelance brings many rewards.

That's good news. Just as long as those of us who work alone remember to go out and see and talk to other people, it is a good life. My cat seems to think so too, although his conversation is a little limited!

I hope you enjoy this issue.

Hazel Reid Editor

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The rewards, risks and quality of self-employment

Recent research published in July by the Association of Independent Professionals and the Self-Employed (IPSE) suggests that most freelancers feel that being self-employed brings more rewards than risks.

ARE THE REWARDS WORTH THE RISKS?

Becoming a freelance can be both exciting and scary. It's exciting because of the prospect of freedom and control. But it's scary because of the risks you inevitably open yourself up to.

The risks are great enough that, if you're a freelance already, you've probably often asked yourself whether it's actually worth it. But if you're just starting out or thinking of making the leap into self-employment, it's important to be aware of the possible rewards, but also the potential risks.

WHY TAKE THE RISK?

So, why do people take risks in the first place? Experts aren't entirely clear on this, and there are many different theories. One popular view is that, by and large, people are willing to take risks because they anticipate significant rewards.

Starting and running your own freelance business can certainly be extremely rewarding. It is well documented that many people decide to go freelance out of a desire for greater control over their careers, and [past research](#) has shown that working for yourself can have a positive impact on personal well-being.

IPSE set out to discover what exactly it is about freelancing that makes it so rewarding. Four out of five respondents said the most satisfying elements were not having to deal with company bureaucracy or office politics (82 per cent) and having the freedom to choose projects they actually want to work on (81 per cent).

As well as giving people the freedom to pick and choose their projects, freelancing can eventually significantly increase earning potential. In fact, 79 per cent of IPSE's respondents said this was another of the most rewarding aspects of freelancing.

Looked at from this perspective – as a career free from bureaucracy and filled with professional freedom and financial prosperity – it's hardly surprising some people just dive straight into freelancing without worrying about risks and potential challenges.

But freelancing isn't just easy rewards: there are risks and challenges too, which you need to consider and prepare for.

“Satisfaction is generally very high among the self-employed”

WHAT SHOULD YOU PREPARE FOR?

One of the biggest risks that freelancers fear is that they will not be financially prepared for their retirement. In fact, 69 per cent of IPSE's respondents said this was among their biggest concerns about working independently.

The current pension system and how it operates for the self-employed was a significant concern for almost half of those surveyed (46 per cent). Many of the pension options on offer at the moment just don't work for the self-employed because they don't take into account key factors such as fluctuating incomes and periods without work. Nor is there an employer who can contribute. As a result, many self-employed people find themselves struggling to save for later life.

Another of the main risks for freelancers is being investigated by HMRC (65 per cent). HMRC investigations cause considerable anxiety for freelancers; they are also a significant financial burden.

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Many freelancers (60 per cent) fear not being able to work as a result of illness or injury. As a freelance, you get neither holiday pay nor sick pay, so it will pay – literally – to factor in downtime and non-working periods when you negotiate your rates.

IPSE's survey also showed that the availability of work is another major concern for many freelancers (60 per cent). The promising news, however, is that [IPSE's Confidence Index](#) has consistently shown high activity in the freelance sector, so perhaps this is more of a perception than a reality.

In short, then, saving for later life and not being able to work due to illness or injury are the two factors unanimously shared by the UK's self-employed workforce as a whole. Irregularity of income and unpredictable finances, as well as not being paid on time by a client, are other major causes of concern according to the UK's self-employed.

So, despite the diversity within the self-employed workforce, there is a commonality to their fears.

IS IT ALL WORTH IT?

Most freelancers seem to think so. The vast majority (83 per cent) of those surveyed said that they felt the rewards they get from self-employment outweigh the risks. Clearly, even fears about retirement savings and HMRC investigations can't overshadow the advantages of having full control of your career. Freelancing will always involve a degree of risk but, based on these results, perhaps the biggest risk of all is not taking one.

WHAT MAKES FOR GOOD SELF-EMPLOYMENT?

Developing skills and knowledge is more important for self-employed people's sense of career progression than increasing their rate of pay, according to a further report by IPSE and the Involvement and Participation Association, [Working Well for Yourself: What Makes for Good Self-employment?](#)

The report surveyed 800 self-employed people across the UK about what constituted 'good work' for them. Those surveyed were part of the self-employed population in all occupations and sectors, including editorial freelancers.

First of all, it found that work satisfaction levels are remarkably high among the self-employed: 7.3/10. This reinforces an earlier survey that showed general

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What is the [Association of Independent Professionals and the Self-Employed](#) (IPSE)?

It's the largest association of independent professionals in the EU, representing over 74,000 freelancers, contractors and consultants from every sector of the economy. It's a not-for-profit organisation owned and run by its members.

IPSE believes that flexibility in the labour market is crucial to Britain's economic success. It is dedicated to improving the business and political landscape for freelance working through its active voice in both Government and industry.

Being a member of IPSE provides you with a safety net for periods when you cannot work due to illness and injury, as well as other compensations for unforeseen disruptions to your business. With your financial well-being in mind, IPSE membership provides you with access to a pension scheme that gives you the opportunity to save securely at far lower rates than you would pay with similar schemes.

IPSE aims to be the principal and definitive source of knowledge about freelancing and self-employment in the UK. It works with leading academic institutions and research agencies to deliver relevant, detailed empirical evidence about evolving market trends. This research supports IPSE's work with Government and industry, as well as providing key market intelligence to help its members with business planning.

The information in this article is reproduced by kind permission of IPSE.

SFEP BENEFITS

The SfEP also offers benefits and discounts to its members, including cyber liability insurance, professional indemnity insurance and a legal helpline, along with discounts on training courses, software, books and events. Find out more in the [benefits section](#) of the SfEP website.

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work satisfaction is higher among the self-employed (81 per cent) than for employees (61 per cent).

Looking to the future, the report also asked self-employed respondents how they measured career progression. In response, 64 per cent said by increasing skills and knowledge – significantly more than the 50 per cent who said by increasing annual turnover. Few respondents, just 16 per cent, said being able to hire other people.

Together, these findings suggest that, rather than striving to be empire-building entrepreneurs, most self-employed people simply want to continue working for themselves and become experts in their field.

CONCLUSION

The new IPSE report has identified four key areas affecting the work satisfaction of the self-employed: work-life balance, client relationships, payment culture, and increasing skills and knowledge.

Based on these findings, the report produced a number of recommendations to promote 'good self-employment'. In summary, these are

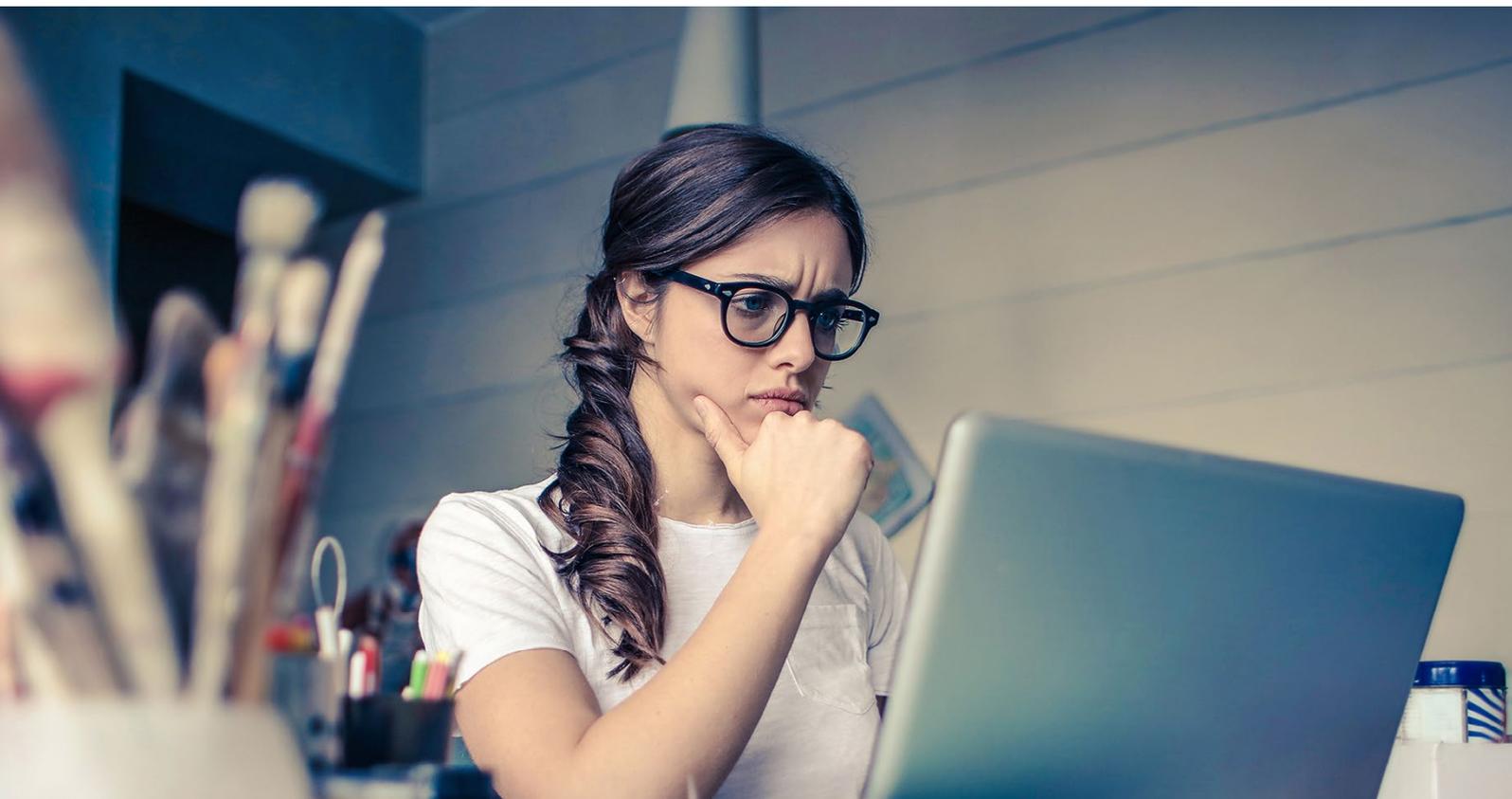
- ensure a reasonable income and a way of coping with the variability of that income
- tackle late and non-payment of invoices by enshrining the Prompt Payment Code in law and

giving the Small Business Commissioner tougher powers to act

- clarify client obligations and promote good practice to ensure clients are able to work even more productively with the self-employed, while respecting their autonomy
- reduce social isolation at work and help self-employed people to support each other
- provide access to affordable training and professional development opportunities to improve skills
- allow for the freedom and opportunity to undertake meaningful work that gives a sense of purpose.

Simon McVicker, IPSE's Director of Policy, commented: 'A timely and incisive report, this confirms what anecdotal evidence has been telling us for a long time: work satisfaction is generally very high among the self-employed.

'Determining how the self-employed measure career progression is hugely important. From this report, it's clear that rather than seeing themselves as the next Richard Branson and wanting to build up a business empire – as policymakers are prone to think – most freelancers actually just want to hone their skills and become experts at what they do.' **EM**





LOUISE HARNBY

is a proofreader and copy-editor. She curates *The Parlour* and is the author of several books on business planning and marketing for editors and proofreaders. louiseharnbyproofreader.com

Your 7-step non-marketing plan

We all know that we should be building our editorial business through marketing – but many of us dive under the desk at the very thought! LOUISE HARNBY has a different view of what we can do to promote ourselves.

It's rare to hear editors say they don't have time to learn how to become better at their jobs.

Books, courses, conferences and workshops litter our schedules. And so they should. Continuing professional development (CPD) is vital – even for experienced editors.

What rears its head more frequently in our ranks is the challenge of finding time for business promotion. Social media and content marketing are frequently perceived as two of the deepest rabbit holes.

“If a bare cupboard is looming, stick with me”

MARKETING DISENGAGEMENT

I've published a free 46-minute webinar called '[How to get editing work quickly](#)'. It's aimed at editors in crisis – those for whom the client cupboard is bare. The web page on which that video sits has had just under 1600 page views at the time of writing. The webinar itself has been watched over 650 times.

Some of the viewers are just curious – the cupboard is full but they want to see what that

Harnby woman's been up to. But for many, that crisis is a reality. And I believe it's one that can be avoided by committing to regular marketing.

We must find a way to make business promotion work for us one way or another. Whether that means emailing publishers regularly or making ourselves visible online will depend on our target clients, but we must do *something*. Sitting mutely in the SfEP's Directory of Editorial Services is not a strategy: it's a waiting game. If that works for you, brilliant: you can stop reading. If a bare cupboard is looming, stick with me.

I'm going to try to persuade you to create some amazing content for your website – resources that can rank in the search engines, that are shareable on social media, that can make your website a space where a potential client thinks, 'I want to work with this editor because they understand my problems and care about solving them.'

And all without doing any marketing.

A 7-STEP NON-MARKETING PLAN

1. Forget about marketing

Seriously. I'm not going to talk about that anymore. This plan is about education.

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2. What don't you know?

Pick a topic that you don't know about, or want to learn more about – something that will make you a better editor if you can master it (or begin the process of mastering it).

Maybe it's gender-neutral language in business writing; or narrative point of view in fiction; or using the subjunctive; or how to write sex scenes that aren't cheesy or naff; or managing equations in LaTeX; or tackling the American Psychological Association's convoluted guidance on referencing; or whatever.

3. Research that topic

Read chapters in relevant books and reference manuals, do a course or attend a workshop, scour the web for articles, go to the library, ask some experts ... whatever you normally do when you need to learn stuff.

4. Create order

Take notes, draw spidergrams, place the key points in lists or tables, break your ideas into sections so you

Follow Louise's plan – have your cake and eat it!

can identify the gaps and dig deeper ... whatever you normally do to make sense of the stuff you've learned.

5. Write an essay

Imagine yourself teaching what you've learned. Turn your material into an essay, lecture plan, report or handover notes. Draft and tweak until you have something you'd be proud to show a colleague, a student or your former university prof – and that will make sense to you when you revisit your learning later.

6. Pat yourself on the back

Skills improvement is one of the 'major aims' of the SfEP. You've invested time in becoming a more informed, knowledgeable editor who's better placed to serve your clients. This kind of business development is what separates the pros from the chancers.

7. Make it pretty and available

Turn that essay into an attractive PDF booklet, webinar, slideshow or article and upload it to your website. Tell as many people as possible that you've done this. You can use your mouth to tell anyone standing next to you. You can use a pigeon to alert those further afield. And if you fancy going global, use social media. It's free, fast and won't poop on you! I hate it when pigeons do that ...

'Harnby, you trickster! I see what you're up to,' I hear you say. 'That's content marketing.'

Well, you can call it that if you want to, but all I'm doing is waving the SfEP banner for editorial CPD.

Plus, what's more interesting and useful to a client? A yawn-inducing bullet list of all the training courses you've done, or a resource that shows that learning in action?

IS IT CPD OR IS IT MARKETING?

Most of us do make time to learn how to be better editors. Most of us *don't* make time to make ourselves visible. And, yet, those two activities needn't be distinct, *shouldn't* be distinct. When we learn, we are better equipped to do our jobs and therefore more marketable. The trick is to take a final step and publish that learning in formats that are shareable and in spaces that are discoverable.

It's CPD *and* marketing. It's having your cake and eating it. Have I convinced you? **EM**



LYN STRUTT

studied linguistics and learned you could travel the world teaching English. Then, in 2003, she discovered freelance editing and proofreading. [SfEP Advanced Professional Member](#)

Green ideas and friendly milk – what is linguistics?

A warm welcome to LYN STRUTT, who is joining the stable of writers for *Editing Matters*, putting together a regular column about linguistics. In her first article she answers the question, ‘What is this thing called linguistics?’

When I was asked to write about aspects of linguistics for *Editing Matters*, the answer felt like a no-brainer. I studied linguistics, I used to teach English, and almost all my editing work is on English language teaching materials, so linguistics is part of my working life. But I couldn’t help wondering (cue Carrie Bradshaw voiceover) ... *What aspects of linguistics are relevant to other editors?*

What is linguistics? I still get asked, when I say what I studied at university, ‘So how many languages do you speak?’ Part of the problem is that the word for that kind of person (*linguist*) is more easily articulated – and better known – than *linguistician*. Plus they make films about linguists, sometimes featuring Audrey Hepburn.

Linguistics is the scientific study of language and its structure, but it does not necessarily lead to the acquisition of a new language. It can tell you how we believe people learn languages, but it’s up to you to put that theory into practice for any languages you learn after your native tongue (you don’t get a choice for that one).

STRUCTURE

In the first year of a linguistics degree, the foundation topics are usually divided into three strands. The first, *structure*, includes syntax (the

structure of sentences) and morphology (the structure of words). This is a lot like what we all know of as grammar, albeit on steroids. It produces some nice things, such as Chomsky’s famous sentence ‘Colorless green ideas sleep furiously’, to illustrate a sentence that is grammatically correct, but nonsensical (although many have tried to assign meaning to it since). Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie provided their own version in a sketch in 1989, ‘Hold the newsreader’s nose squarely, waiter, or friendly milk will countermand my trousers.’

“What we all know of as grammar, albeit on steroids”

SOUNDS

The second strand is *sounds*. Phonetics looks at the production of individual sounds – what your articulatory apparatus does differently to produce an ‘n’ sound as opposed to an ‘m’ sound (or, indeed, to say *linguistician*). Phonology looks at how the sounds are organised in language – and, for example, why *tenpin bowling* can sound like ‘tempin bowling’.

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Discourse analysis
– how people in
a conversation
know when it's
their turn to speak



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MEANING

Backtracking slightly to the issues with green ideas and friendly milk, the third strand is *meaning*. This includes semantics (the meaning of words and sentences) and pragmatics (the meaning of language in context). If the response to 'Would you like a cup of coffee?' is 'Coffee would keep me awake', then – in terms of semantics – the meaning is that the hot beverage on offer contains a stimulant and I know from experience that this would prevent me from going to sleep. Pragmatics, however, looks at whether this response is an acceptance or a refusal of coffee. So the context – the time of day, what is known about my need for sleep and my plans – leads to an interpretation. And so allows us to continue to not say what we really mean.

Even if we assume that all editors have a love of language, I'm not convinced that the analytical approach involved in studying syntax and semantics speaks to all of us, or changes how we do our jobs. The strand that features a lot in my own work is sounds, because it is very much about spoken language.

AND?

There must be more to linguistics, right? Didn't I promise earlier that linguistics could tell you about learning a language? Yes, and so much more. For example, how *villain* used to mean 'farmhand' (language change), how the name for a bread roll depends on the region we live in (language variation), how different language is used in different settings and whether *no-brainer* is appropriate for this text (stylistics), and how people in a conversation know when it's their turn to speak (discourse analysis). These are topics covered by the interdisciplinary branches of psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics, historical linguistics, sociolinguistics and applied linguistics. This last looks at practical applications of language studies, and covers language teaching, translation and speech therapy. It therefore includes the texts I edit – and it might also be where we would put the work of linguist and linguist Marc Okrand (seen here on [YouTube](#)) creator of the Klingon language for *Star Trek*. **EM**



ALISON SHAKSPEARE
is enjoying her SfEP Professional Membership to the full as an ambassador and forum moderator – in between copy-editing and designing. shakspeareeditorial.org

A neat package of useful knowledge, Bristol fashion

The mini-conference concept is growing and has moved south. In July, members of the SfEP's South-West local groups gathered in Bristol for their first mini-conference. It was a resounding success, as ALISON SHAKSPEARE explains.

On 13 July 2018, 67 SfEP members from the South-West (and beyond) gathered in a well-discovered, comfortable Bristol venue to listen to the varied presentations. There was ample opportunity during breaks for old/virtual friends to find each other and to establish new contacts. The friendly and helpful venue staff kept us well lubricated with drink and supplied fresh and varied food.

“Members need to show evidence of regular CPD”

After a warm opening welcome from community director **Sue Browning**, the first speaker **Paul Beverley** presented ‘What can macros do for you?’ The audience was split between passionate advocates for Paul’s view that his macros, particularly FRedit, can save significant time and effort when proofreading, and those who found them overwhelming. But the consensus was that one should start slowly. Do watch his [video of examples](#).

David Norrington had a jocular approach to ‘Turning a Word document into a finished book’ – or,

at least, how it is done at process-driven [Wordcatcher Publishing](#). He happily admitted to being a benevolent dictator, in a position to address his own pet peeves. Do they use freelancers? Occasionally. There are some processes they definitely don’t do in house, such as indexing.

Juanita Zoe Hall, managing editor for national publications, and **Lauren Newby**, managing editor for local publications, from the much larger [The History Press](#), presented ‘Selecting and working with freelancers’. They publish over 200 titles a year, and use freelance editors and proofreaders to even out their workflow, having assessed their qualifications and experience and matched them to suitable jobs. ‘We aim at an eagle-eyed public’, so a high standard is essential, as is maintaining the balance between being quick and being thorough. They encourage applications from SfEP members (no rates mentioned) through freelancing@thehistorypress.co.uk.

John Firth, the SfEP membership director, explained the SfEP membership and upgrading process and highlighted various points that should be noticed. Applicants need to show how their experience is relevant, since assessment panellists cannot be experts in everything. Referees need to be willing to provide a reference and must be allowed to do this by their employers; they have to be able to vouch for the

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experience you cite and provide up-to-date contact details.

A pass in the SfEP basic editorial test, plus references relating to non-core skills (e.g. business skills) may be accepted at lower-grade levels. Members need to show evidence of regular continuing professional development at all grades. SfEP and PTC courses are well regarded; informal indications of the acceptability of other courses are in the members' area of the SfEP website – or contact the [SfEP professional development director](#). When totting up your training points, distinguish between those gained from training courses and those from conferences or events. Training and experience points are cumulative, and the upgrade form – in the members' area of the website – can be filled in online as you gain relevant experience and saved until you are ready to submit it.

Sarah Price gave her presentation 'PDF mark-up: a lightning tour' using Adobe Reader DC – which is free, but do check you have the latest version. Sarah's step-by-step explanation of the main toolbar fleshed out the useful hand-out, and even hardened users gained new nuggets of information. The principal warning

was to avoid a plethora of 'sticky notes', which have a tendency to move of their own volition. Further sound advice was to use angle brackets to highlight instructions, to differentiate them from words that need to be added to the document. The clumsiness of the pencil and eraser tools was contrasted with the ease of the drawing tools. A quick look at customisation came with the warning that it becomes default, so beware. The usefulness of the filter tool is that, to avoid drowning, you can choose whose and what type of comments to see and deal with.

The lively closing discussion panel of **Margaret Aherne** (trainer for the SfEP and Publishing Training Centre), **Hazel Bird** (Wordstitch Editorial Services), **Liz Jones** (Liz Jones Editorial Solutions) and **Vanessa Plaister** (editorial freelance) received plenty of contributions from the audience.

The topics included

- *Advice for beginners* – at first you will take any work that is offered, but aim to specialise; engage in regular training; it's OK to turn down work if it is not right for you.

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David Norrington of Wordcatcher Publishing addresses the audience



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- *Greatest challenges in everyday work* – authors, especially the brilliant-but-chaotic; the logistics of running a business and working efficiently; setting boundaries; switching off from work and taking time off.
- *Sound advice on marketing* – checklists of regular marketing activities; choosing who to send a speculative enquiry to; maintaining contact with colleagues; looking at things you already do through a marketing lens.
- *Red flags, indicating a problem client* – being asked for multiple sample edits; delayed payment excuses; trusting your instincts; standing up to make a difficult phone call – it's empowering.
- *And finally* – the perfect client brief; how the SfEP can raise the profile of editing/proofreading; essential/desirable equipment.

Sue Browning sent us on our way after we heartily joined in her warm congratulations to the organisers, **Liz Hammond** and **Clare Diston**, for a successful day, with many thanks for all their hard work. **EM**



*Top:
Sue Browning
opened – and
later closed –
the proceedings*

*Bottom:
Lauren Newby
(left) and Juanita
Zoe Hall from
The History Press*





ANDREW COULSON

is a copy-editor, recovering engineer and unashamed geek.

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What should I do with my old electronics?

Everyone probably has at least one old mobile phone, a laptop that's seen better days or a PC whose abilities have been superseded by the latest kit. ANDY COULSON finds out what we should do with our past-their-sell-by-date items.

I've recently had to replace my phone – the old one had decided it didn't want to charge any longer.

Whilst it is nice to have a shiny new one, I realised I had quite a pile of old semi-functional phones, laptops and other electronic bits around the house, so decided I should really do something responsible to dispose of them.

In Europe the Waste Electronic Equipment (WEEE) directive puts the responsibility onto shops and online sellers to provide a free, in-store, take-back service to their customers or set up an alternative free take-back service for any equipment sold since 2007. Now, I can't remember seeing that option when I bought my phone, nor can I remember seeing any of the [other information](#) that the government suggests I should have had. Amazon, though, does have a clear explanation of how it handles this in its [help section](#).

There are a lot of stories that describe how waste material for recycling that ends up overseas is often processed in poor and unsafe conditions by people who are paid very little. The *Guardian* recently

“A solid screwdriver and a hammer will do the job nicely.”

featured a [story on Moradabad](#), which is a centre for this type of recycling. The story makes a depressing read. However, many UK WEEE recyclers do process and recycle that material in the UK.

FIRST THINGS FIRST ...

If you are going to get rid of electronic equipment, it is sensible to remove all your personal data. Simply deleting it is often not sufficient, as the data can still be recovered. Before you start on that procedure, do remember to back up your data.

Generally, with a mobile phone or tablet, disconnecting the device from your account (usually Apple or Google) and applying a factory reset will do this. Rather than describing each of these here, I suggest you have a look at this [CNET article](#) that explains this in a step-by-step way.

With a laptop, increasingly the facility to securely wipe your data comes built into the operating system. In Windows 8 and 10, if you select Start > Settings > Update & security > Recovery, you can reset the machine to a factory-fresh state. On a Mac, running Lion or newer, you can do this through Disk Utilities, accessed by holding down the command and R keys as you restart the computer.

If you want to make sure that your data has been thoroughly erased, it needs to be overwritten with

continued »



Remember to destroy your hard disk ...

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random data several times. The Mac's Disk Utilities have a feature for this. For other computers, [Darik's Boot and Nuke](#) allows you to create a bootable CD that will allow you to do this. You can then set up a clean install of an operating system if you wish.

If for any reason you can't overwrite your data, your other option is to physically destroy the hard disk. A solid screwdriver and a hammer will do the job nicely.

WHAT DO I DO WITH IT?

The waste industry asks us to 'reduce, reuse, recycle', and it is a good way to look at our options. If we've already purchased something else, 'reduce' is not an option. Our port of call, then, is 'reuse'.

If you are technically inclined, you may be able to repurpose retired equipment for a new job. Old laptops can be reused to allow a printer to be shared over a network, or as a shared file store and back-up. Older smartphones can often be reused: for example, [Alfred](#) is an app that turns a phone into a wireless video camera.

There are also many options that allow you to sell on old but working equipment. This means that marketplaces like eBay and Gumtree are options as well as chains on the high street such as CEX. There are specialists such as Magpie and Mazuma Mobile who focus on mobile phones. Larger chains, such as

Argos, and charities, such as Oxfam, are also tapping into this market. Or you can gift items using [Freecycle groups](#).

As a business, you can't simply drop the equipment off at the local recycling centre. However, there are businesses and charities that will take that equipment. Whilst your local council won't deal with business equipment, they often have partners who will, so the council recycling website is often a good starting point.

Many of these business recycling companies will collect your old equipment for free, but they often ask for a minimum number of items or have a 'wait until we're in the area' policy to cut down on unnecessary mileage. They will usually offer a service to certify that your data has been aggressively wiped, too. These companies aim for something like an 80 per cent reuse to 20 per cent recycling rate, as they can often reuse at least part of something. Many of them process the recyclable material on site. All of these companies should be registered with the Environment Agency, and it is a good idea to look for ISO certification too.

Passing on your old electronic equipment will not only give you welcome extra space, you can also comfort yourself with the thought that your old phone or laptop will get a new existence helping somebody who needs it to make an improvement to their life. **EM**



LUKE FINLEY

is an Advanced Professional Member, and set up Luke Finley Editorial in 2013. He will edit just about anything, but specialises in social policy and politics. lukefinley-editorial.co.uk

The chameleon conundrum

Commas can be very useful little additions in our punctuation arsenal but they can also be intensely irritating. LUKE FINLEY discusses using commas with conjunctions and independent clauses – an insertion that can raise questions and even arguments.

When I looked at commas in [July/August](#) and [September/October](#) last year, I warned that I was covering only a few of the uses of this chameleon of the punctuation world. Another that has come up on the [SfEP forums](#) since then is their use when joining two independent clauses.

My thanks go to Shuna Meade for raising the question on the forum, and to the respondents on the thread for helping to clarify the point (and providing the chameleon metaphor!).

WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

Some of us were taught (and some of us have ten-year-olds who are still being taught) **never** to use a comma before *and* or *but* when joining two independent clauses. In reality, there's clearly no such rule.

I am a copy-editor and I work from home

I am a copy-editor, but I used to work for the council

You could insert a comma in the first example or delete the one in the second without making either of these sentences wrong. But if that's true, why use a comma in one case and not the other? The choice of conjunction is different, clearly, but is that the decisive factor? Not necessarily; these sentences are also acceptable:

I am a copy-editor, and I have a ten-year-old son

Nick has a son too but he's already a teenager

In the absence of a strict grammatical rule, then, how do we decide?

CLOSE CONNECTION

The strength of the connection between the two clauses is probably the most useful consideration. In my first example I chose not to use a comma because the two clauses seemed inextricably linked: the fact that I work at home tells you something relevant about the kind of copy-editor I am.

In the second example there is a shift of focus between past and present: the comma marks this more distant connection.

In the third example, omitting the comma might misleadingly imply a connection (some illegal, nepotistic subcontracting arrangement?) between two clauses that aren't very closely related.

The fourth is maybe the most ambiguous case: I felt that the shift here was between the previous sentence and this one, not within the sentence, so I didn't need a comma. But this is a style choice and you'd be free to approach it differently.

However, it's worth noting that, by definition, *but* is generally more likely to introduce a contrast or a change of emphasis than *and*, so the comma is more likely to be appropriate.

Consider also whether there's a second subject in the second clause: if so, the relationship between the two clauses is likely to be less close – although this is certainly not always the case.

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REMOVING AMBIGUITY

The comma before a conjunction can help to prevent misreading:

Aristotle was an early empiricist and no great thinker ...

Quite a bold claim! But the sentence continues:

... who followed could be taken seriously without having engaged with his works.

Serious misunderstanding may be unlikely here, but a comma before the conjunction would prevent an unintended jarring or comical effect that might bring the reader up short.

PROSODY

Commas are sometimes described as marking natural pauses in a sentence. Steven Pinker (*The Sense of Style*, Penguin, 2014) points out that this was once their main function, citing Jane Austen's famous [opening line](#) to *Pride and Prejudice* – its two commas would now both be regarded as incorrect. Dickens also peppers his long sentences with commas: some of them now seem unnecessary or wrong, but if you ever have to read his work aloud, you might be grateful for them.

The description of commas as marking a pause isn't always helpful – it's fairly subjective, and it doesn't apply equally to all comma uses. It might be worth bearing in mind in relation to the usage discussed here, though: where there's a shift of focus as already discussed, a pause is also more likely. **EM**



NEW SFEP GUIDES WITH A NEW LOOK

The Society has recently published two new and three updated SfEP guides, all with a redesigned look.

- *Getting Started in Fiction Editing*, a new guide written by Katherine Trail, helps you with the nuts and bolts of fiction editing. Where do you start? What type of editing should you do? What do independent authors or publishers need? You will also learn about continuity, style sheets and the risks of overcorrection.
- In *Proofreading Theses and Dissertations*, also new, Stephen Cashmore covers the usual proofreading tasks but also warns that you need

to be aware of potential plagiarism. What do you do if you suspect it? How to get work, calculate fees and negotiate with students is also covered, as is how much to query, intervene in or change a student's writing.

- *Marketing Yourself* by Sara Hulse (3rd edition), *Editor and Client* by Anne Waddingham (2nd edition) and *Pricing a Project* (2nd edition) have all been revised and given the new look.

The new guides can be purchased in the [SfEP shop](#) as either a hard copy or a PDF (£6/£5 to members). **EM**

On Editing: How to Edit Your Novel the Professional Way

H. Corner-Bryant and K. Price, John Murray, 2018, 304 pp., £14.99 (pbk)
ISBN 978 14 73666 68 9

Reviewed by *CARRIE O'GRADY*

'Blockbuster' isn't a word you hear much anymore – not since the ignominious failure of the DVD chain.

But eight years ago, Helen Corner-Bryant, the founder of Cornerstones Literary Consultancy, did very well with her book *Write a Blockbuster and Get It Published*, co-authored with Lee Weatherly. This new book follows closely in its footsteps.

The first and principal part, 'Editing your novel', is written by Kathryn Price, chief editor at Cornerstones. She starts off on square one, suggesting you ask yourself, 'What's my book about?' and 'What's my genre?' Both are excellent questions, but odd choices for a guidebook ostensibly about editing. After all, no amount of revision is going to turn that trans-galactic space opera into a cosy mystery.

And so it goes on, with plenty of sound advice that will be enormously helpful to a new writer but may prove frustrating to the author (or editor) who thought she was nearly out of the woods. The chapter on viewpoint begins, 'One of the first choices you'll make is what viewpoint to tell your story from.' Price provides a sterling summary of the pros and cons of each type of POV. What she doesn't do, though, is show how to redraft a text from one POV to another – no easy skill, but essential to a

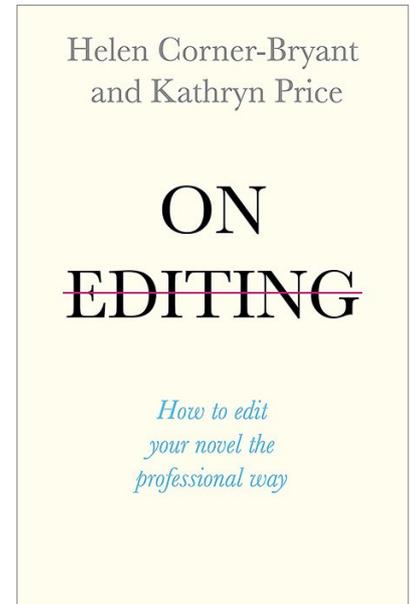
developmental editor or a more seasoned novelist.

The examples given are superb, whether they're from genuine blockbusters (e.g. Stephen King's *Misery*) or are made-up snippets to illustrate a point. Fiction editors will learn from these examples, but are unlikely to use them as templates

to copy. The revisions that Price suggests are often drastic: more like total rewrites. Yes, the book is improved afterwards; but is this a level of editing that we contractors are able, or expected, to take on? Better to simply absorb the thoughts behind the changes on a general level.

Price also breaks down elements of fiction: the four types of plot twist, nine types of overwriting, 'tension troubleshooting' – a list that could be titled, 'Just why is your book so boring?' Editors will find these helpful when pinpointing problems for clients. People who work with independent authors submitting to agents may also benefit from the second section, although again it's aimed at the writers themselves.

The last chapter deals with 'show not tell' – the very point where the standard text, *Self-Editing for Fiction Writers* (R. Browne and D. King), starts off. That's no coincidence. Corner-Bryant and Price have produced a valuable guide for those hoping to write a blockbuster, but it won't be much use to those who have already been once or twice around the block. **EM**



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DISCOUNT ON **FreeAgent** ACCOUNTING SOFTWARE

A new benefit for SfEP members has been negotiated: a discount on FreeAgent accounting software. This can help you deal with the accounting side of your business, and will save you time and stress – all too common when it comes to finances.

THE DISCOUNT

FreeAgent is offering SfEP members a **60 per cent discount** on the initial six months, followed by a lifetime **20 per cent discount** on subscriptions to its online accounting software for small businesses.

- Standard price: **£19.00** per month + VAT
- Discounted price: **£7.60** per month + VAT for first six months, then **£15.20** per month + VAT

The prices quoted are for sole traders. Other packages are available for partnerships and limited companies.

A 30-day trial is available before subscribing.

FIND OUT MORE

FreeAgent has set up a [dedicated web page](#) that outlines what the

software can do and gives details of the SfEP discount. You can sign up for the 30-day free trial and take advantage of the discount if you decide to continue using the software thereafter.

FreeAgent is currently updating its website, so do check before paying that the correct discounts have been applied. If you experience any difficulties, contact FreeAgent's support team at: support@freeagent.com.

All SfEP benefits can be found at [this page](#), once you have logged in to the members' area.

Note: online accounting software is not a requirement for sole traders, and may not be cost-effective for those with simple businesses or who are just starting out. EM

WELCOME TO THE SfEP!

- A warm welcome to the 102 **new members**, one **Corporate Subscriber** and two **rejoiners** who have joined the Society since the last issue of *Editing Matters*.
- Congratulations/welcome to the following members who have upgraded to or joined the SfEP at **Intermediate Member** level: Anna Baker, Catherine Benson, Adam Bodley-Tickell, Ruth Bramley, Lucy Brown, Tania Charles, Kate Coe, Gillian Cullis, Kirsten de Beer, Melissa Dennis, Louis Greenberg, Jane Hather, Christina Hitchcock, Liz Hurst, Melanie James, Martin Murphy, Christina Petrides, Angharad Rosser-James, Gwen Schwarz, Jessica Spencer, Guy Tindale, Jenny Warren, Stephanie Warren and Ann Wood.
- Congratulations/welcome to the following members who have upgraded to or joined the SfEP at **Professional Member** level: Sheena Billett, Phillippa Britton, Sarah Dronfield, Catherine Dunn, Anne Gillion, Melissa Nelson, Muhammad Ridwaan, Alison Terry, Rachel Wheeler and Caroline Worden.
- Congratulations/welcome to the following members who have upgraded to or joined the SfEP at **Advanced Professional Member** level: Hannah Caddick, Sara Donaldson, Helen Holwill, Emma Hoyle, Joanne Osborn, Gráinne Treanor and Kasia Trojanowska. **EM**



Seen on a wall at a conference centre in middle England. Two queries: (1) If it is locked, is it not shut? (2) There is no keyhole or lock, only a handle to pull the door open. What purpose does the sign serve? **EM**



PAUL KING

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The Famous Mr. Ed.

PAUL KING delves into the mysterious world of abbreviations and contractions, being distracted along the way.

I have a problem.

Now, I know that my wife would suggest that I have many problems (the most pressing being why have I not yet modified a kitchen cupboard and why do I keep wandering off the point of a conversation?), but this problem has to do with abbreviations. Actually, it is not my problem. I know what an abbreviation is, it's just that I have an author who does not. Or rather, he thinks he does and peppers his bibliography with them (just like a spray of machine gun bullets has peppered a wall that the hero of the novel I'm reading has dived behind in an attempt to survive to the end of the chapter, it's a really good read ... ah, sorry, back to the abbreviations).

“Leave his ‘eds.’ alone as this was the way it was done in America”

Perhaps it has to do with the fact that he is an American (and in saying that I realise that the UK and the USA remain two great nations bound by friendship and separated by a common language) and the publisher wants it styled in UK English. The author sees the transformation as ‘something of a gray area’ – no it's not, but it might be a grey area ... arrgh!

WHERE WAS I? OH, YES. ABBREVIATIONS.

Once I started checking the bibliography I found plenty of abbreviations. There they were – ‘ed.’ and

‘eds.’ But the style guide made it clear: ‘do not use a full point for a contraction’. Easy. And, yes, I am well aware that our American cousins (I actually do have some American cousins, well, they are really second cousins, but ... hang on, back to the point of the article) follow *The Chicago Manual of Style* and not *Hart's Rules* (reading either of which at bedtime is bound to send you off to sleep in minutes – it always works for me ... ahem, perhaps I need to focus more on this article). So in the UK we write ‘Dr Brown’ (funnily enough, when I was a child my doctor was called Dr Brown, a really nice chap, I once had ... oops, sorry), and in America they write ‘Dr. Brown’.

I pointed out to the author that where there was more than one person listed as an editor it should read as ‘eds’, not ‘eds.’, as ‘eds’ is a contraction of ‘editors’, and contractions do not end in a full point. In other words, ‘When is an abbreviation not an abbreviation? When it is a contraction.’ (Which would be a clever puzzle to put into a Christmas cracker – you know, it would be a great idea to make a set of Christmas crackers just for us. They would be great at SfEP Christmas dinners and ... maybe I should get back to abbreviations, yes?)

Well, apparently not. His response was that he meant ‘edited by’, so could I please leave his ‘eds.’ alone as this was the way it was done in America. I inwardly shuddered (strange that, because shuddering, actually shivering, is caused by involuntary contractions of skeletal muscle by the autonomic nervous system and skeletal muscle is on the outside of the body as opposed to the smooth

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muscle found inside the body, which cannot actually 'shudder' because it depends upon a different form of nervous ... ah, I'm doing it again, aren't I?). But, I argued, surely if you refer to a single editor as 'ed.' then more than one editor must be 'eds'. Then I remembered an item from *The Chicago Manual of Style* (item 15.6 actually; which is really weird as this was what had sent me to sleep last week, and just goes to show that my rambling on does pay dividends – although I have yet to convince my wife ...). There it was, 'noun forms are abbreviated, but verb forms such as *edited* by are spelled out'. Yes. Victory shall be mine! (Perhaps I was taking this too personally – I don't normally.) I pointed this out to the author, who for some reason did not reply to that particular email.

But there was more ... He listed items as being '2nd. ed.'. More transatlantic email explanations whizzed back and forth to explain yet again that 'ed.' could not also mean 'edition' and how about using 'edn' instead.

Eventually the 'ed.', 'eds' and 'edn' were all sorted out. Transatlantic relations were once more restored, and I could sleep easy that night (still clutching my copy of *Hart's Rules*).

POSTSCRIPT

Paul admits to not staying focused on occasion. For example, the title of this article comes from a 1950s American series about a talking horse called Mister Ed, but the series title was *Mr Ed*, which had no full point, which is unusual for US English ... (Any screaming you think you can hear in the background comes from Paul's long-suffering wife ...) And since writing this article he managed to put new shelving in the kitchen cupboard ... eventually. **EM**



Autumn colours at Lancaster University

A reminder: this year's SfEP conference is almost here. We hope that those who are going to Lancaster have a rewarding, interesting and, above all, enjoyable time. **EM**



[We wanted to include a photo of Paul's wife screaming, but we don't have one, and in any case we don't know what she looks like (very charming, we think). Instead we found this toy bear who is quite cross about something. The meaning we wanted is conveyed but any resemblance between Paul's wife and this little bear is completely coincidental and in no way implied. At all. – Ed.]