Copyediting

LANGUAGE IN THE DIGITAL AGE

The Business of Copyediting

MANAGING THE TALENT   *by Daniel Sosnoski*

You face occupational hazards as a professional editor. Stress and anxiety are constant companions, and the sedentary nature of your job can wreak havoc on your health. Many an editorial career has been ended by alcoholism.

But your primary challenge is managing the authors with whom you work.

Your skill as an editor is, in large part, measured by your ability to get the most out of the talent. This requires tact, care, and the ability to quickly determine the type of writer you are working with.

DELIVERING THE BAD NEWS

Editing is, ultimately, a kind of criticism, and people don't like to be criticized. When you de-clutter a wordy sentence or reword a clumsy passage, you're saying something to the effect of, "You made a mistake, and I can write better than you can." At least, that's how a writer might feel, especially if you had to bring out the meat ax for major surgery.

New authors may be quite open to revisions, knowing that their work likely needs polishing. Other new authors can be defensive and see your edits as a personal affront.

On the other end of things, one seasoned professional might be comfortable with being edited, having worked with editors for years. And another old hand might consider anything beyond a light touchup to be an insult and grounds for a battle.

You will meet writers who are self-confident and recognize that you found the flaws they couldn't see. And there will be the prima donna *artiste* who will want to approve the smallest adjustment before the text heads to press.

In some cases, including those above, writers can be difficult to work with because they have had unpleasant experiences being edited and now loathe the process and the people involved. Avoid embittering the talent.

CONTROLLING THE DAMAGE

Still, despite your best efforts, you'll wind up with an angry author sooner or later, and if you can put the fire out, you'll help protect your reputation and that of your publisher. How you resolve things will depend on the author's type of personality.

With the defensive newbie: "This was out of my hands. Text had to be cut to fit." "It was due to our house style." Lean on the institution and don't let it get personal.

With the grumpy old pro: "You're absolutely right. But you know how these things go. What can you do?" Sympathize; acknowledge that the system is at fault.

With the prima donna: The prima donna looks for an argument for the sake of argument; redirect them toward a source that can't be confronted. An anonymous "they" can work wonders.

"Your writing is so darn good—I fought to keep them from changing it. In the end, I was outvoted, and I told them they were making a mistake."

AVOIDING TROUBLE

Your best protection is to never make edits without a good reason. "I like it better this way" isn't a reason. Whatever you change, be certain you can explain why if you are challenged. If you can defend your edits, you'll earn the trust and respect of the talented writers who keep you in business. ∎

Lessons in the Mechanics of Copyediting

by Erin Brenner

In this issue, we get down to the brass tacks of copyediting: mechanical editing issues.

Charles Harrington Elster, a.k.a. the Grandiloquent Gumshoe, returns to our pages in our feature story, "The Curious Corporate *Who*." We last saw him in the **August–September 2012** issue, writing about pleonasm. In his new article, Elster traces the usage of *who* to represent corporations and other nonhumans. Copyeditors are allowing it in text, so does this represent a shift in the language?

Elsewhere, Jonathon Owen outlines the tenses, moods, and aspects of verbs and teaches us some terminology to go with them. We may edit verbs by ear, but a conscious understanding of them can help us explain our changes better. Mark Farrell asks fellow editors their opinions on *plus* as a conjunction, and Norm Goldstein advises us on how to deal with new senses of old words.

There are a lot more lessons and tips to improve your copyediting, so grab your favorite beverage and settle in to this issue of *Copyediting*.

Then **drop me a line** and let me know what you think. ■

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IN STYLE

What's the Meaning of This? *by Norm Goldstein*

A word's usage changes over time, so copyeditors must ensure the use of not only the precise word but also the precise meaning of a word.

For example, after a recent speech against sexism by Australia's female prime minister, the Australian *Macquarie Dictionary*, considered the authority of the English language in Australia, added a second definition to *misogyny*. Alongside the well-known "hatred of women" is now "entrenched prejudice against women." *Macquarie* editor Sue Butler said, "The language community is using the word in a slightly different way."

Literally has seen an update, too. Google recently added "used to acknowledge that something is not literally true but is used for emphasis or to express strong feeling" to its definition. Merriam-Webster and Cambridge dictionaries also have this informal, non-literal definition of *literally*, in Merriam-Webster's case, it has had this definition for decades.

We'll stay away from arguing about the value of these changes for the moment, but note that such changes aren't unusual. Further, not all dictionaries agree on exactly what all the senses of meaning are. *Random House Webster's* lists 21 meanings for the word *sense*, while *Webster's New World* has 9.

How do copyeditors keep up with today's fast-moving changes and decide whether to use them?

Standard, traditional desk dictionaries can be helpful to a certain extent, but as a practical matter they can't stay up to the minute.

Online references vary but generally are the best sources for current senses. There are certainly enough of them, from the well-known *AP Stylebook* to the more recent *Yahoo! Style Guide*, among others. *Urban Dictionary* is helpful with more-colloquial terms.

House style guides are also excellent resources—if kept up to date.

A caution, though: Don't jump on the proverbial bandwagon too fast. Be sure the new meanings have been tested and proved their worth.

A copyeditor's experience counts, too. ■

INSIDE JOKE *by Sage Stossel*

THE ENTREPRENEURIAL FREELANCER

THE COPYEDITOR IS IN

Rates to be discussed

The Curious Corporate *Who* *by Charles Harrington Elster*

In the late 1980s, William Safire, who wrote the column "On Language" for the *New York Times Magazine* for 30 years, gave an eight-cylindered bloopie award to Chrysler and its chairman, Lee Iacocca, for the following ad: "Chrysler is the only American car maker who builds their convertibles from start to finish."

One error in that sentence is obvious: the plural pronoun *their* doesn't agree with the singular subject *Chrysler*; it should properly be "Chrysler…builds its convertibles." The other, related error is less obvious, at least to people who don't edit for a living: Chrysler is not a *who*. It's a *that*.

By the late 1990s, I was seeing and hearing this blunder all over the place: in the pages of the *New York Times* and other reputable publications, on National Public Radio, and even at a Rite Aid drugstore, where an announcer once intoned over the loudspeaker, "Rite Aid is the only drugstore who…"

I heard Colin Powell, when he was secretary of state, say, "We're looking at those terrorist organizations who have the capacity…" I heard Alan Greenspan, when he was chairman of the Federal Reserve, say, "This should affect the companies who do a lot of borrowing."

To my amazement and chagrin, I even found this eccentric *who* in that pinnacle of copyedited prose, the *New Yorker*:

You wouldn't think so, however, if you consulted the Census Bureau and the National Endowment for the Arts, who, since 1982, have asked thousands of Americans questions about reading.— Caleb Crain, "Twilight of the Books," December 24, 2007

If you twisted my arm—really, really hard—I might concede that the NEA is a *who*, but the Census Bureau? C'mon.

CORPORATE JARGON

This "corporate who," as I began calling it, also caught the attention of Bryan A. Garner, who—Bryan is definitely a who—in his 1998 *Dictionary of Modern American Usage* (the predecessor to *Garner's Modern American Usage*), spelled out the rules for relative pronouns:

Who is the relative pronoun for human beings (though *that* is also acceptable); *that* and *which* are the relative pronouns for anything other than humans, including entities created by humans. But writers too often forget this elementary point.

To illustrate that forgetfulness, Garner gave two citations, one for *institutions who* from the *Business Standard*, the other for *companies who* from a 1984 book called *What They Don't Teach You at Harvard Business School*.

"If it doesn't have a face, it's not a *who*—it's a *that*.

"In acceptable usage, *who* is for people (sometimes animals). *That* is neutral and can go either way—living beings or inanimate objects.

"This has always been the case. The few historical examples in the *OED* of *who* used for inanimate things refer to objects that are being personified or given a personality—like a force of nature, a statue, or a sailing ship.

"But there's no good reason to humanize a company or an institution, despite the Supreme Court! In news writing, especially, such personification should be avoided."
—Patricia T. O'Conner and Stewart Kellerman, authors of *Woe Is I* and *Origins of the Specious*

That got me thinking. Could the rampant misuse of *who* for nonhumans have gotten its start as business jargon intended to personalize or personify the impersonal? Safire suggested as much when he speculated that the copywriter of the Chrysler ad had chosen to use the personal *who* and *their* instead of the faceless *that* and *its* because

we're one big happy family here at Chrysler, marvelously diverse and individualistic, and besides, if I tried to fiddle with anything the chairman said, I'd have a tailpipe wrapped around my neck.

I also couldn't help noticing that a preponderance of my own citations for the corporate *who* were business-related. For example:

"trade-reliant Asian economies who are banking on a pick-up in the United States"—Reuters

"Daimler-Chrysler and Ford, who sell lots of pickups and SUVs"—NPR's "Marketplace"

SLIPPED MOORINGS

I also began to wonder, as I saw and heard *who* applied more and more to things, whether the language might be undergoing a profound shift in the centuries-old norms governing pronoun usage. If *who* could be wrested from its moorings as the relative pronoun for people, what dire pronominal drift might follow? Would a dark day come when people started worrying about things *who* go bump in the night?

Bill Walsh, a longtime copyeditor at the *Washington Post* (and a member of *Copyediting*'s editorial advisory board), was one of the next usage watchers to sound the alarm about this trend. "I often see phrases like *the countries who belong to the group* or *the companies who sell the product*," he wrote in his 2000 style guide *Lapsing Into a Comma*. "Unless you're specifically referring to people, *who* should be changed to *that*." In *The Elephants of Style* (2004), Walsh pronounced the corporate *who* a "common error" and added a nuance to his earlier ruling: "*That* should also be used in cases where a noun might refer either to inanimate entities or to people (*the manufacturers*, *the distributors*)."

Paul W. Lovinger, in *The Penguin Dictionary of American English Usage and Style* (2000), also weighed in from the editorial trenches. "*Who* suits only people," he ruled. "Although organized entities, such as companies, unions, associations, and institutions, are made up of people, they are not people."

So noted. But it could be argued that the Supreme Court's 2010 decision in the *Citizens United* case, which accorded corporations equal status with individuals, inadvertently legitimized the aberrant use of *who* for entities. Check in with Google News on any given day, and you'll get thousands of hits for *companies who*, *corporations who*, *businesses who*, *institutions who*, *organizations who*, *countries who*, *schools who*, *churches who*, *hospitals who*, and even *robots who*, as in, "robots who hunt mutants in the name of protecting humanity" (*Los Angeles Times*).

What is going on here? Why have writers and educated speakers been flocking to the corporate *who*, and why are copyeditors letting them get away with it?

> "As for the corporate *who*, I think it's silly. But PR folks in corporations may well insist on it. They'd be better off avoiding the third person and using the corporate *we*. Instead of 'LawProse is a company who is changing how lawyers communicate,' it should be 'LawProse: We're changing how lawyers communicate.'"
>
> —Bryan A. Garner, author of *Garner's Modern American Usage*

AN ABUNDANCE OF RELATIVES

To try to answer those tricky questions, it's helpful to know a bit about the history of relative pronouns. Bergen and Cornelia Evans provide this summary in their *Dictionary of Contemporary American Usage* (1957):

> As a relative pronoun *who* competes with *that* and *which*.…*That* has been the standard relative pronoun for about eight hundred years and can be used in speaking of persons, animals, or things. Four hundred years ago *which* became popular as a substitute for the relative *that* and was used for persons, animals, and things. [That's why, in the King James Bible of 1611, the Lord's Prayer begins, "Our Father which art in heaven."] Three hundred years ago *who* also became popular as a relative. It was used in speaking of persons and animals but not of things.

> This left English with more relative pronouns than it has any use for.

Which raises another set of questions: Could a superfluity of relative pronouns and the long-standing competition between them account for our tendency, every few hundred years or so, to allow one to invade the grammatical territory of another? And is the way I chose to frame that last sentence, giving a set of words the ability to perform an action, the crux of the problem? Are we for some reason—perhaps our own humanness—ineluctably drawn to personify the inanimate and personalize the impersonal?

Take a peek in the *Oxford English Dictionary,* and you will find some interesting examples dating from the late 16th century of *who* used not only in literary personifications but also "in reference to an inanimate thing or things," or to an antecedent that appears to denote "a number of persons collectively" but that is still decidedly inanimate.

Here's Shakespeare in *Richard II*: "Put we our quarrel to the will of heaven, who…" And again in *Hamlet*: "He's loved of the distracted multitude, who…" Here's Joseph Addison in the *Spectator* (1711): "This Authority of the Knight…has a very good Effect upon the Parish, who…" And here's Oliver Goldsmith in his *History of England* (1771): "The Hanse-towns, who were then at war…" From that set of quotations, you could conclude either that long-dead English writers are to blame for the current mishandling of *who* or that writers of English have long had an illicit love affair with personification.

GRAVITATIONAL FORCES

Apparently the corporate *who* users reason that if an entity does something only a human being can do, it must do it as a *who*, a humanlike agent, and not as an impersonal *that* or *which*. For example, since cooperating is an action humans can perform but insentient entities can't, the reasoning says it must be *countries who cooperate* rather than *countries that cooperate*. And since insentient entities can't see, it must be "Analysis Research, *who* is looking for talented people" (actual radio ad). The problem with this reasoning—if it can

> "I see *who* for *that* most often with words such as *contractor* and *employer*—words that could refer to people but clearly, in those cases, do not. I think copyeditors should enforce the principle, and when they don't, I sometimes think they fear the use of *that* for a person more than they do the use of *who* for a thing."
>
> —Bill Walsh, author of *Yes, I Could Care Less: How to Be a Language Snob Without Being a Jerk*

be called reasoning, rather than some kind of weird grammatical gravitational force—is that anomalous citations in the *OED* notwithstanding, it flies in the face of several hundred years of standard usage and the consensus of a gazillion authorities.

"The users of English gradually restricted *who* until now it is used only in speaking of persons," Bergen and Cornelia Evans assured us in 1957. "In this specialized area it has driven out the relative *which*, and this is now used only in speaking of animals or things. *Who* may in time drive out *that* as a relative referring to persons, but it has not yet done so."

Could the Evanses have imagined, almost a half-century ago, that *who* would soon attempt to drive out *that* as a relative for things? That it would aspire to be The Who Who (That? Which?) Conquered the World?

If Rite Aid can now be "the only drugstore *who*," you have to wonder what bizarre thing we will choose to pseudo-humanize next. Machines? Don't laugh, because the unthinkable is already happening. A machine can't think, at least not in the way a human being does, but if we can imagine a machine that can think, then of course it must be a *who*, not a *that*. Consider this quotation from the *Huffington Post*: "Machines that calculate, and, projecting, machines who think."

I think that if machines ever get that feisty with our grammatical norms, it'll be high time for us editors, like Huck Finn, to light out for the territory.

Charles Harrington Elster is an author, most recently of **The Accidents of Style: Good Advice on How Not to Write Badly**. *He welcomes questions and comments at his website:* ***www.charlesharringtonelster.com***. ■

GRAMMAR ON THE EDGE

Getting Tense *by Jonathon Owen*

English verbs are pretty simple. We don't have a complex system of verb endings, as many languages do, and we have relatively few irregular verbs. But English still has an elaborate system of tenses, aspects, voices, and moods. Keeping them all straight can be difficult if you don't know the terminology. Even the venerable *New Yorker* gets things wrong on occasion, as when a writer referred to the "imperative tense" (it's actually a mood). Most editors probably have at least an intuitive understanding of this system, but it can be helpful to have a more explicit understanding, especially when diagnosing and correcting problems with verbs.

All verbs have tense and mood, and most have voice (except for intransitive verbs), but not all verbs have aspect. Strictly speaking, tense refers simply to time: present, past, and future. *I walk, I walked, I will walk.* A verb can have only one tense at a time; there's no such thing as a present future form.

Aspect is a little more abstract and difficult to pin down. It describes how an action relates to time, such as whether the action is complete or ongoing. English has two aspects, perfect and progressive. The perfect is created with a form of *have* plus a past participle, as in *I **have walked**,* while the progressive is created with a form of *be* plus a present participle, as in *I **am walking**.* The perfect usually indicates that a previous action is still relevant, while the progressive shows that an action is ongoing or is unfinished at a given time.

Unlike tenses, aspects are stackable; you can combine them to make a perfect progressive, as in, *I **have been walking**.* Whatever the aspect, tense is determined by looking at the main verb. In the case of *I **have been walking**,* the main verb is *have,* which is in the present tense, so the construction is a present perfect progressive. The past perfect (*I **had walked***) is sometimes called the pluperfect.

I covered the passive voice in the **April–May issue**, so I won't go into too much depth here. Grammatical voice is the relationship between the action of the verb and its arguments (that is, its subject and object). The active voice is the default for transitive verbs; it puts the doer of the action in the subject position and the recipient of the action in the object position, as in *I **kicked** the ball.* The passive voice switches the order of object and subject, and it's usually created with a form of *be* followed by a past participle: *The ball **was kicked** by me.* It's possible to combine the passive voice with aspects and the subjunctive mood to produce a variety of different constructions, such as a future perfect passive (*The ball **will have been kicked** by me*) or a past progressive passive (*The ball **was being kicked** by me*).

English also has three grammatical moods (at least according to traditional analysis; modern grammars often call the past subjunctive mood the irrealis). The indicative mood is the default and is used nearly all the time. The imperative is used for commands and instructions, and it uses the plain form of the verb (like an infinitive without *to*), such as ***Kick** the ball* or ***Be** quiet.* It doesn't combine with aspects or the passive voice, and it rarely, if ever, poses a problem when editing (unless, as in that *New Yorker* example, you call it a tense). The subjunctive, however, can combine with aspects and the passive voice, producing forms such as the past subjunctive progressive (*I wish I **were going***) or past subjunctive passive (*If the ball **were kicked** by me*). I'll cover the use of the subjunctive in a later column.

This may all sound very technical, but don't stress out. Verbs are not as hard as you think, and having a better handle on the terminology will help you find answers to problems and edit more confidently. ■

ASK THE EDITOR *with Erin Brenner*

Recently, I've noticed people say *take a decision* instead of *make a decision*. At first, I thought this was a Gallicisim: I live in Canada and have noticed that Francophones often say this. After hearing it used by an English-speaking news anchor on CBC Radio 1, though, I began to wonder whether this is now the preferred collocation. Any thoughts?—*Linnet Humble*

Take a decision is a Britishism, but not a very common one, and it's even rarer in the United States and Canada. (Although according to one discussion, the French do say *prendre une décision*, which perhaps influenced English speakers at some point.)

Here are the total instances of both in the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), the Corpus of Canadian English (STRATHY), and the British National Corpus (BYU-BNC):

Term	Instances
COCA	
make a decision	1,652
take a decision	23
STRATHY	
make a decision	233
take a decision	6
BYU-BNC	
make a decision	247
take a decision	27

Linguist M. Lynne Murphy explains on her blog that *make* and *take* are light verbs in this phrase and, as a result, speakers can interchange them. In English, she writes, the term *light verbs* "usually refers to verbs that add very little to the sentence but occur with nouns (usually) that have been derived from verbs."

The gap between uses of *make a decision* and those of *take a decision* has been widening in recent decades, as well, as this Google Ngram shows.

So while *take a decision* isn't wrong, it's an uncommon British phrase. I'd steer a non-British writer away from using it, lest readers trip over it, as you did.

I'm writing to get your input on the wording of a question included in a BBC grammar quiz. I have a bone to pick with question number 3:

> I'd like to introduce you to my sister Clara, who lives in Madrid, to Benedict, my brother who doesn't, and to my only other sibling, Hilary.

If there is only one sister, then a comma is needed between *sister* and *Clara*, because the sister's name is nonessential information. Without the comma, the implication is that there are two sisters. It's true that *Benedict, my brother who doesn't* implies that there are two brothers. But that makes the sentence illogical; there can't be only three siblings. There should be two brothers and two sisters.—*Sandra Boedecker, Senior Editor, World Vision*

This sentence is so contorted that it's no wonder even its creators are confused.

To show that a word, phrase, or clause is nonessential (nonrestrictive), we put commas around it, as in this example sentence: *I had dinner with my sister, Cathy, last night.* The sentence's meaning would be the same if Cathy were dropped. If I had another sister, I would want to restrict the meaning of *sister* to one in particular: *I had dinner with my sister Cathy last night, not my sister Sally.*

The quiz sentence is meant to force readers to determine which phrase is essential and which is not. We can simplify things to find the answer. First, when elements of a series contain internal punctuation, it's standard practice to change the commas that separate the elements into semicolons to clarify the elements:

> I'd like to introduce you to my sister Clara, who lives in Madrid; to Benedict, my brother who doesn't; and to my only other sibling, Hilary.

Now we can clearly see where one element ends and the next begins. As written, the first element, *to my sister Clara*, tells us that there is more than one sister; otherwise it would need to be *to my sister, Clara*. So logic tells us that there are two sisters.

The next element introduces a brother, Benedict, but intends to confuse the reader by contrasting him to Clara (she lives in Madrid, he doesn't).

The final element introduces a third sibling, Hilary. If the speaker has only three siblings (according to the last element) and *Clara* is restrictive, suggesting there is another sister, then Hilary has to be a sister.

A sentence like this seems unlikely in real life; the comparisons between siblings aren't parallel and seem almost random. But if it did showed up in a manuscript, I'd completely rewrite it—once I knew exactly which siblings were which.

What is your impression of content mills? Are they worth the effort for little income? A good way to get started? —*Judy Wilkin, American Association of Critical-Care Nurses*

On principle, I dislike content mills. They grossly underpay for the work performed and publish a lot of poor-quality content. They don't seem to care about the author, the editor, or the reader, just themselves.

In the real world, businesses like content mills will never go away, and it's sometimes necessary to work for one to pay the bills, gain experience, or increase one's visibility.

It's highly unlikely that you'll get any feedback on your work for a content mill, and you won't make much (if any) money, so it's important to know what you would get out of working for one. When I started freelancing full time a few years ago, I wrote briefly for Examiner.com. I did it to market my business. I never earned a dime, but I didn't expect to. Instead, I used it to grow my audience and develop interest in my services. ∎

RESOURCES

Testing the Value of Plagiarism Detectors *by Phillip Blanchard*

If you edit copy long enough, it'll happen to you. You'll suspect plagiarism in the copy you're editing.

Accusing a writer of plagiarism is no small thing. Yet it is your responsibility to document and then report to a superior editor any evidence you find.

The best way to begin documentation is a simple web search for a suspect excerpt. This works very well if you are editing news copy. There is a good chance you will find the source of a purloined passage without having to resort to specialized applications.

There is a better chance you won't find anything. Most suspicions of plagiarism turn out to be unfounded, which means you'll spend a good deal of time looking for something that isn't there.

Several products are marketed as plagiarism detectors that can smooth, and sometimes speed up, the process of checking copy. For editors on tight deadlines, these applications might take up more time than the process is worth. If they catch plagiarism, though, it's time well spent.

All these products depend, more or less, on web searches. Some are desktop applications; others run solely on the web.

They are most helpful when checking live news copy. They are less so for verifying such things as book manuscripts. Most books cannot be accessed online, although Google Books has indexed a good number.

An exception, of course, is when an author plagiarizes from online sources. For example, Benjamin Radford of the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry **documented** the wholesale theft of online material for a book called *The Element Encyclopedia of Vampires: An A–Z of the Undead*. The author had stolen much of her book from various websites.

I tested four plagiarism checkers with the following:

▶ An unpublished paragraph from a story whose lead was plagiarized from a corporate website in 2006. The plagiarism was discovered before publication, and the lead was rewritten.

▶ Two paragraphs from the *Washington Post*, which were mostly lifted from the **Arizona Republic**.

▶ A paragraph from *Gambit*, a New Orleans weekly, that was largely taken from a Louisiana state government website. The *Gambit* story and references to its author have been obliterated from the newspaper's website.

▶ An excerpt from an obscure blog post I wrote recently.

▶ A *New York Times* editorial, which as far as I can tell was entirely original.

The best test obviously is the unpublished paragraph. The others yielded many false positives, mostly from the original sources or copies posted elsewhere. It is worth noting that the unpublished paragraph was caught seven years ago with a simple web search.

THE PLAGIARISM CHECKERS

Desktop Plagiarism Checker is a simple, free desktop application that searches Google, Babylon, and Yahoo (although not all once) or Google Books and Google Scholar (again, one at a time). I tested the examples using the Google option. You can come up with the same results with a normal Google search, but Desktop Plagiarism Checker organizes them a little better.

The free, web-based **Dupli Checker** allows you to check text pasted into a box or as uploaded documents. If you want to check more than one document or text block, you'll have to register. However, its failure in four of the five tests (see table) demonstrates a serious flaw.

It would be better to use an alternative on the fly.

iThenticate is the most robust of the tested applications. It adds newspaper, magazine, and journal databases to web searches for a more complete survey. It is not cheap, however, costing $50 to run a single document. Annual subscriptions are available to organizations, but you have to fill out a web form and ask for a quote. (I was given access to iThenticate for a short time to conduct these tests.)

Using iThenticate can be time consuming, but it's clearly the most thorough of the test subjects. You wouldn't want to use it on deadline, but it would be great for advance copy or long-form work, like books and magazine articles.

Plagiarism Finder has a free online version and a Pro desktop version that costs $19.95, which is what I tested. The application generates a report as a local HTML page that includes links to wherever it finds matches or partial matches to the text you enter. You can paste text into a search box or open a document from your computer.

It is nicely organized but did not find any of the sources of test text.

CONCLUSION

After several days of working with these plagiarism detection tools, I concluded that some of them might be useful to confirm suspicions about specific copy but not refute them.

Plagiarism cases come to light almost always after the offending text is published and is usually reported to a publication by someone who came across the original by chance or, sometimes, by other authors.

This is especially true for books that are plagiarized, not only because publishers don't thoroughly investigate manuscripts in prosecutorial fashion, but also because there is no reliable database of published works. Google Books is trying, but that project is far from completion, not least because publishers are wary of allowing Google to index their copyrighted products.

It's impossible to know how often plagiarism is caught before publication. Publishers, especially newspapers, are not likely to make a public announcement when one of their writers is caught stealing.

Information about the use of plagiarism detectors comes almost exclusively by word of mouth, which is unreliable. The impression is that they are not widely used by general interest publications.

Should that change? Perhaps, but it is unlikely given the investment in time, labor, and resources necessary to install a system that reviews everything. So until someone comes up with a practical way of doing that, plagiarism checking—with and without the help of detection programs—is likely to stay scattershot and deficient.

Phillip Blanchard is a freelance editor. He worked in the newspaper business for more than 35 years, most recently for the Washington Post. *He is the proprietor of* **Testy Copy Editors**, *the online forum, and writes for* **BusinessJournalism.org**. ∎

TEST RESULTS

Text	Desktop Plagiarism Checker	Dupli Checker	iThenticate	Plagiarism Finder Pro
Unpublished paragraph	Failed to identify plagiarism	Failed to identify plagiarism	Linked to the original and identified 93% as plagiarized	Linked to 19 sites, none of them the original
Post paragraphs	Linked to the *Post* and original story	Linked to the original story and 7 other pages	Linked to the original and many other copies	Failed to find the original story but linked to stories about the plagiarism
Gambit paragraphs	Linked only to a story about the plagiarism	Linked only to a story about the plagiarism	Reported as plagiarized and linked to several sources, but not the original	Failed to find the original sources but linked to stories about the plagiarism
Blog post	Linked only to the original text	Returned "no plagiarism detected" but didn't find the original	Found no links and made no conclusions	Linked to the original text and falsely flagged other sites
NYT editorial	Linked to the original text and copies	Linked to the original text	Found the original link and returned "0% plagiarized"	Linked to several pages that legitimately reproduced it and falsely flagged other sites

CURRENTS

Additional Conjunction Creates Division Among Editors *by Mark Farrell*

While those who approve of starting a sentence with conjunctions such as *and* or *but* have prevailed in usage battles, wordsmiths have been slower to accept sentences beginning with *plus* used as a conjunction.

This is likely because the word is seldom used as a conjunction, while *and* is exclusively a conjunction and *but* is primarily one. Add to that the tenacious resistance to such sentence constructions by a few traditionalists, and the answer to the question of whether it is acceptable usage is less than clear-cut.

I asked some colleagues what they think about starting a sentence with *plus*, and the majority fell on the side of rejecting the construction in most forms of writing.

Laura McGowan, a freelance editor from Topeka, Kansas, told me that she is "liberal when it comes to grammar and usage, believing that language is a living organism constantly in transition and evolution. That said, I don't like the idea of starting a sentence with *plus*. …Because *plus* is a less-recognized conjunction, it is confusing…at the start of a sentence."

Bonnie Granat of Granat Editorial Services in Boston, Massachusetts, was less open to the idea, writing (with a little local flavor): "Nevah!" Granat sees the usage as "a weak substitute" for *and* or *also*. "I've never heard anyone say it," wrote Granat. "I see it online in what I consider poorly written text."

Granat admits that Merriam-Webster doesn't consider it wrong, but it notes that it's "not generally used in formal situations."

Chrysa Cullather, an editor from Highland Park, Illinois, wrote that she would limit the usage to "dialogue in a script and then only rarely. It's just not a word I would use as a conjunction in formal writing." Cullather added that starting a sentence with *plus* makes it "sound like a nonsentence" to her.

MaryAnne Gobble, a freelance editor and writer from Raleigh, North Carolina, is generally open to beginning a sentence with a conjunction, but *plus* does give her pause. "I don't hesitate to start sentences with other conjunctions," wrote Gobble in an email to me. "But *plus* feels different to me, as does *or*. In a formal document, I'd definitely look for a rewrite. That said, I try not to say 'never' in editing. …I can imagine there may be a context in which stetting such a usage would be the best choice."

Lynn David Newton, an editor from Columbus, Ohio, replied that, unlike other editors I surveyed, he does hear it in American English, "usually in speech, and I doubt that it makes many people shudder." When editing fiction, Newton would allow the conjunction *plus* in dialogue, "depending on the time period of the setting (e.g., not any earlier than maybe 1960, and any earlier than that would send me looking for examples with dates)." He would also allow it in the narration if the usage fit the author's style.

Newton is more likely to apply his red pen to such usage in formal writing. "It's probably best to choose some other word than *plus* as a conjunction, particularly at the beginning of a sentence, when an abundance of other choices are available," he wrote.

Stan Carey, an editor from Galway, Ireland, sees the increased appearance of *plus* at the beginning of a sentence as a sign of the language's vitality. "I think it's fine in casual contexts, but it tends to be avoided in more formal prose. Given that some people still object to sentence-initial *and*, it's not surprising that a similar use of *plus*—a much more recent development—attracts criticism. It's too new to be accepted at all levels, but as a grammatical innovation it signifies a language in good health." Carey has written more about the subject at the *Macmillan Dictionary Blog*.

As one who enjoys the versatility of the English language, I agree with Carey: I see no reason to balk at beginning a sentence with *plus*, though, given its informal nature, I would rewrite such a sentence in a formal document. ■

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FROM @**COPYEDITING**

Very cool: a font that makes reading easier for people with dyslexia. Dyslexie typeface: ow.ly/oAvij. (h/t @SfEP)

Punctuation lovers[,] rejoice! Apostrophiles Celebrate a Much-Maligned Mark | Copyediting.com ow.ly/o8lRO

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How to Train Your Dragon: Making AutoCorrect Work for You
by Erin Brenner

Open Microsoft Word and type *seperate*. Did it become *separate*? That's Microsoft Word's AutoCorrect feature in action.

We're all familiar with the autocorrect (and autofill) on our smartphones that makes some unusual choices when we aren't looking, such as substituting *divorce* for *Disney* or *grave* for *garage*.

You may also be aware that Word has been automatically correcting typos and replacing text for symbols for a long time. The software comes preloaded with a list of fixes for common errors and symbols; for example, it will replace *hte* with *the* and *(r)* with ®. It will also correct errors such as two initial capital letters, a lowercase letter starting a sentence, and an accidental usage of the caps lock key.

But are you using Word's AutoCorrect to its fullest? AutoCorrect, you see, is editable.

EDITING THE OPTIONS

AutoCorrect has many options, all of which you can choose to turn on or off. (For directions on finding the AutoCorrect menu in your version of Word, go to **Support** on the Microsoft Office website, choose "Word" in the drop-down menu, and type "find autocorrect" in the search box.)

Once you have the menu open, review the options and uncheck the box for any option you don't want. Do the words in table cells sometimes need to start with lowercase letters? Uncheck the option to initial cap the first word in a table cell.

What about when you want an option but not in all cases? You can designate exceptions to the rules.

In the AutoCorrect menu, click on the Exceptions… button to the right of the checkbox list to open the Exceptions window:
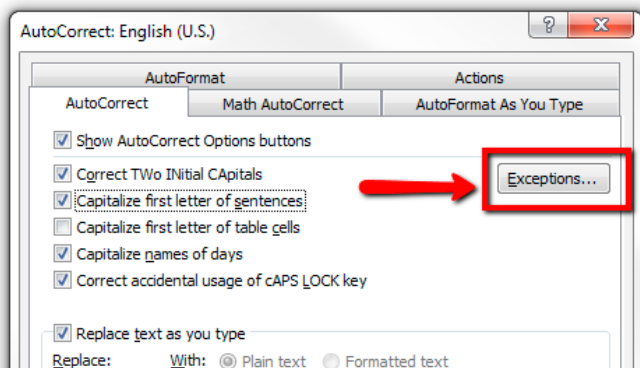
In the AutoCorrect menu, you can navigate to the Exceptions … window and decide whether to follow how Word corrects your text.

Change to: In the AutoCorrect menu, you can navigate to the Exceptions … window and decide whether to follow how Word corrects your text. Let's say you work on cookbooks. You want to ensure that whatever follows *tbsp.* and *tsp.* in a recipe isn't automatically capitalized. No problem: Word includes these abbreviations in the Exceptions list.
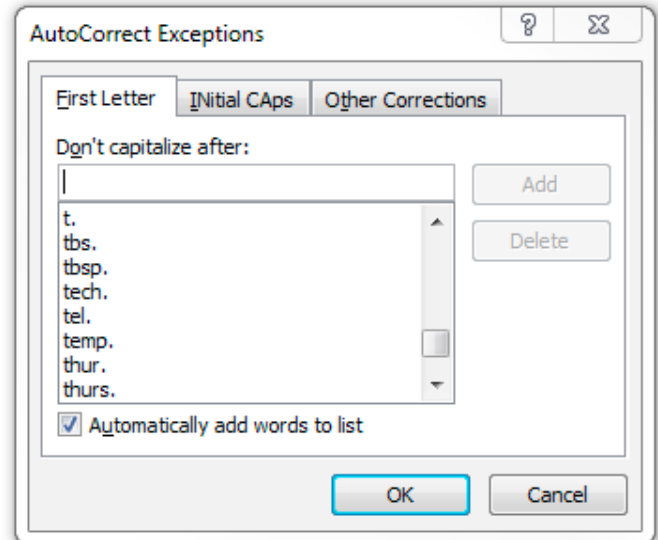

Choose your exceptions to the rules listed in each tab.

The list is editable, however. You can delete any item that doesn't work for your editing and add any that do. Keep track of your editing for a few days, and see what changes would speed up your work.

EDITING THE REPLACE LIST

AutoCorrect also allows the user to edit the Replace text as you type list. This is where AutoCorrect can be particularly useful.

The most obvious edit, of course, is to add any words you commonly type incorrectly. Add your typo in the Replace: box and the correct term in the With: box.
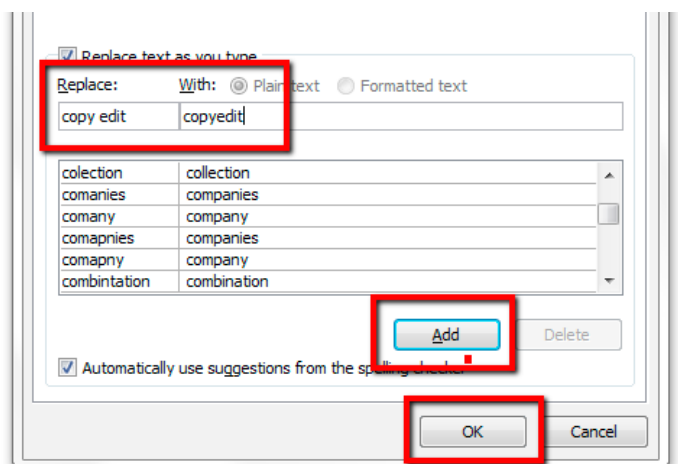
Enter your typo in the Replace box and the correction in the With box.

While you're there, scan the list and remove any typos that aren't typos in your work. Perhaps you edit documents that discuss nursing's associate degree and frequently use the abbreviation *ADN*. AutoCorrect is programmed to change *ADN* to *AND*. To stop it, simply delete the *ADN* entry from your Replace: list.

USING THE REPLACE LIST TO SAVE KEYSTROKES

The best use of AutoCorrect in my experience has been to save keystrokes. For words or phrases you type frequently, write an abbreviation and enter it in the Replace column. Write the full word or phrase in the With column. Now every time you want the full term, just type the abbreviation.

For example, I often write about *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of English Usage*. I don't want to have to type that long title each time—or look it up. So I created an entry in my replacement list that replaces *] mwu* with *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of English Usage*. Now I have just 5 keystrokes (including a space after) to get a 46-keystroke title, and I don't have to recheck the title.

> **TIP:** Geoff Hart recommends starting custom shortcuts with the close bracket (]) because the bracket is usually followed by a space or punctuation, making it unlikely that you'll accidently type your shortcut. You can start your shortcut however you'd like, though.

My main use for these shortcuts is for titles and codes I use often. Thanks to my daily **News Roundup** posts, my list is stuffed with blog titles.

But you can use these shortcuts for any text you repeat often. Fiction copyeditors might find themselves repeating the same query in manuscript after manuscript. They could type up the query and make it an AutoCorrect shortcut. My favorite query shortcut gives me *NTS:* for "Note to Self." When I finish an edit, I search for "NTS:," deal with those unresolved issues, and delete the note.
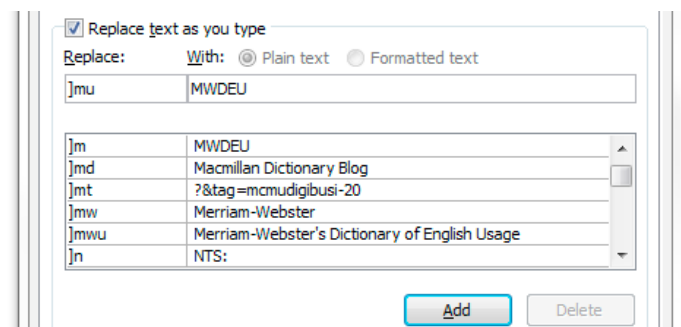
A sampling of my custom shortcuts.

BACKING UP AND SHARING YOUR CUSTOMIZATIONS

Once you've done all the work to customize AutoCorrect in Word, you don't want to lose it. You can back up the changes you've made to reload them if the need ever arises. You can also load your customizations on your next version of Word or share them with colleagues.

AutoCorrect customizations are saved in .acl files, which are located in the AppData\Microsoft\Office folder. (If you're not sure where this folder is, go to **support.microsoft.com** to look up its location in your version of Word.) Once you've located your Office folder, copy all the .acl files into your backup source.

The AutoCorrect entries are also stored in your Normal.dot template (located in the AppData\Microsoft\Templates folder). Consider backing this up as well, but understand that the template also contains all your other customizations, such as styles, macros, and dictionaries.
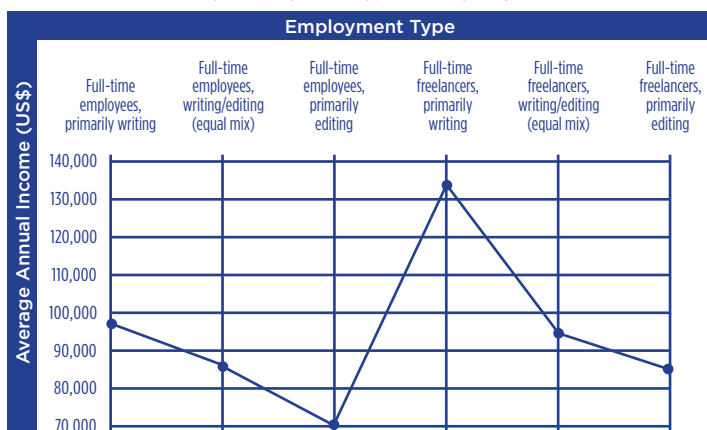
AutoCorrect is a Word feature that often frustrates editors, but it doesn't have to. With a little effort, it can be trained to save your time—and your bacon. ■

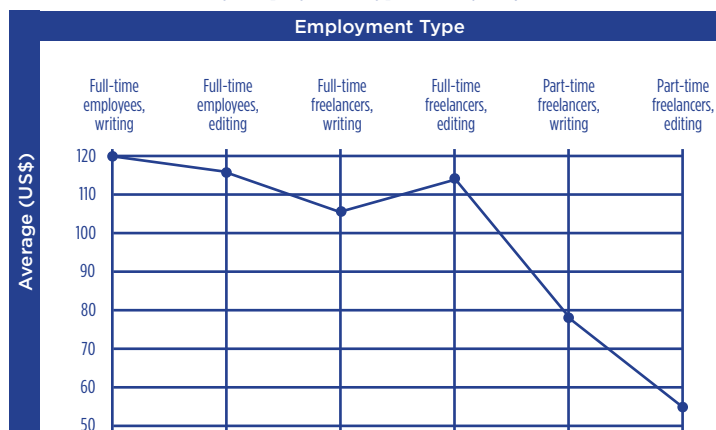# *Medical Communications* by the Numbers

Medical communications is a well-paid specialty, as demonstrated by these charts, drawn from the **American Medical Writers Association**'s 2011 salary survey. Full-time salaries were highest in New England and the West Coast (which includes parts of Canada). You can read the full survey on the **Association's website** and search for positions on *Copyediting*'s **Job Board**.

Medical Communicators' Average Gross Annual Earnings by Employment Type, 2011 (US$)

Medical Communicators' Average Hourly Rates by Employment Type, 2011 (US$)

McMURRY/TMG

WORD RESOURCE ROUNDUP

The Word Maven's Word Maven: David Crystal *by Mark Peters*

David Crystal is the most prolific word maven of our time, and he's possibly the best. The British linguist has written about every conceivable aspect of English, with one eye on history, one on education, and both on entertainment. If you're a word lover, you need to check out **David Crystal's work**.

His latest book, ***Spell It Out: The Singular Story of English Spelling***, reveals the order and logic hiding in the confusion of our spelling system. This potentially snooze-inducing topic is rich and compelling in Crystal's hands, as he shows how English spelling isn't as senseless as it appears. (Read Erin Brenner's review of the book on the ***Copyediting*** blog.)

Crystal's ***Txtng: The Gr8 Db8*** is another impressive work. Like every language innovation, texting has been accompanied by hysteria and misinformation and condemned for its supposed degradation of English. This book is a powerful antidote to such myths, and Crystal makes a strong case that texting strengthens overall writing skills. Language books don't get much more relevant or eye-opening.

The Story of English in 100 Words, in which Crystal tells the entire story of English through the etymology of 100 representative words, is one of the best showcases of Crystal's talent. He asks questions such as, "Why get so excited over a 'little word' like *and*?" and then demonstrates exactly how exciting every word is when you learn its story.

With his light touch and dry wit, Crystal, ever the teacher, makes history lessons on words such as *fopdoodle*, *dilly-dally*, *cuckoo*, *hello*, *schmooze*, *OK*, *webzine*, and *disinterested* lively and readable. Readers learn what Crystal already knows: "When we explore the history of words, we find a window into society."

There isn't a more charming, informed guide to the history and reality of words than David Crystal. I guarantee you'll love his work. ■
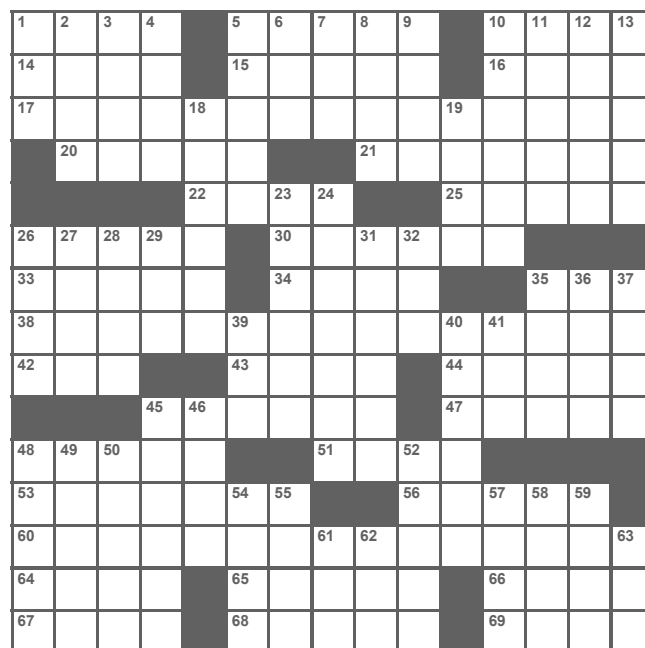
The Crossword
by Myles Mellor

ACROSS

1. Book part
5. "Cut it out!"
10. Five-time US Open champ
14. Almond
15. Auspices
16. All-night party
17. Gardening guy?
20. Boreal forest
21. Old Germans
22. ___ and aahs
25. Dentist's direction
26. "Blue ___"
30. Opens
33. Brilliance
34. Denials
35. Eerie gift
38. Romantic guy?
42. Haw partner
43. Rice-like pasta
44. Diminished by
45. More lively
47. Sportscaster Musburger
48. Ski trail
51. "Get ___!"
53. Profound
56. Contradict
60. 1991 Tinka Menkes film
64. Took advantage of
65. Zeno, notably
66. Assortment
67. Sea slitherers
68. Old Roman port
69. Don't believe it

DOWN

1. Affranchise
2. Genuine
3. Zone
4. Filmmaker
5. Chocolate source
6. "A rat!"
7. "Give it ___!"
8. Sort carefully
9. To be, to Brutus
10. Free
11. Radioactive element
12. A plant of the rose family
13. Shield figure
18. Rabbit-like rodent
19. Engine sound
23. Driven
24. Big bore
26. *Little Women* woman
27. Yearn
28. Hypothetical form of matter
29. Symbol of strength
31. Earlier
32. Wednesday tree?
35. Coastal raptor
36. Bowl over
37. "Check this out!"
39. "___ any drop to drink." −Coleridge
40. Insignia
41. Cause of inflation?
45. Mounts
46. ___ Station
48. Arouse
49. Sign on a plane facility
50. Brace
52. Banana variant
54. C-worthy
55. New newts
57. Come into view
58. Deeply
59. Cut, maybe
61. "i" lid
62. Rocky ___
63. Scale note

For answers, go to **www.copyediting.com/crossword-answer**