

The Canberra



Newsletter of the Canberra Society of Editors volume 19 number 3 April 2010

Next meeting

28 April

6.00 pm

April's meeting will be quite different. We'll have a joint meeting with the Reel McCoy Film Group to watch **Lost Weekend**, a 1945 film starring Ray Milland and Jane Wyman. The film won four Oscars (best picture, best director, best actor and best writing), and is a landmark movie.

What's that got to do with editors? Well, for a start the lead character is an author suffering from writer's block. And yes there's more.

Join your editing colleagues in something quite different.

Please note the venue: National Library Theatre (one floor below the Friends' Lounge) and bring your membership card if you've got it handy.

We won't be going out for dinner afterwards. Instead, we can join the Reel McCoy Society for a light supper after the screening.

NB 6.00 pm start

Editors welcome grammar back into Australian English

The Australian Government recently released a national curriculum. The proposed English curriculum includes a formal teaching of grammar. Within a day, your committee released to the media a statement welcoming the move.

The Canberra Society of Editors is pleased that English grammar is, once again, to be taught in Australian schools. Without delving into the detail of the proposed new curriculum, the Society supports the principle of teaching grammar.

Many editors believe that the formal teaching of grammar should never have been removed from the classroom. The result is a generation of Australians who do not have a basic understanding of the structural elements of their own language.

While editors have made a healthy living from this lack of knowledge, not everyone can afford an editor. Any move that improves the standard of writing in general is therefore to be welcomed.

It is the next generation of writers (and their editors) who will benefit, be they the next Jackie French or a public servant writing a memo. Indeed, a formal teaching of grammar will benefit those who believe they are writing something that is worth reading.

Professional editors make the point that editing involves much more than correcting errors of spelling and grammar. An important task for an editor is to ensure that a piece of writing conveys its intended meaning. To that end, editors work hard to help authors improve the clarity, structure and consistency of a manuscript.

The Canberra Society of Editors welcomes the shift that will inevitably occur in the industry as the changes to English teaching start to flow through to the manuscripts that, one day, will be subject to a comprehensive edit.

March meeting: blogging for business

Hilary Cadman spoke last month about her experiences with blogging, tweeting and facebooking to build her business—or the value of communicating in grammatically dubious phrases of less than 160 characters. Based on her article in last month's newsletter, the talk came with a practical demonstration of the various social media options. We are all grateful to Hilary for stepping in at the last minute to give us such an entertaining and informative presentation.



Training news: three successful rewarding workshops

Your committee for 2009–10

President

Cathy Nicoll 6259 2984
Cathy.Nicoll@atrx.net.au

Vice-president

Damaris Wilson 6247 3111
Damaris.Wilson@afp.gov.au

Immediate past-president and IPEd delegate

Ted Briggs 6161 4924
0407 018 433
tedbriggs@grapevine.com.au

Secretary

Brian O'Donnell 6297 5705
odonnell1@netspace.net.au

Treasurer

Margaret Millard 6288 6754
0402 029 552
margaret.millard@ozemail.com.au

Public officer

Helen Topor 6275 7222 (w)
Helen.Topor@afp.gov.au

Training coordinator

Martin Holmes 0431 268 948
Martin.Holmes-Forte@bigpond.com

Membership secretary

Ed Highley 0412 358 151
Ed@clarusdesign.com

Web minder

Gabby Lhuede
(contact Cathy Nicoll)

Newsletter editor

Gil Garcon 04 1470 1470
Gil.Garcon@ato.gov.au

Newsletter proofreader

Kerie Newell 0412 042 974
kerie.newell@deewr.gov.au

General-meeting coordinator

Briony Winchester
0404 856 925
Bree@couchcreative.com.au

Catering coordinator

Liz Phillips 0403 941 058
liziphillips@gmail.com

IPEd Accreditation Board delegate

Larissa Joseph 6161 5216
larissa.joseph@gmail.com

Committee members

Martin Blaszczyk 6156 0997
Elena Guarracino
Kevin Maguire
Claudia Marchesi

'Building templates in Word 2003'

On Saturday 27 February, Brian O'Donnell presented a training course titled Building templates in Word 2003 to 11 participants at the IT training rooms of Acorn Training and Consulting in Phillip.

Brian told participants that documents are linked to their templates like an umbilical cord and working with templates unlocks the power of Word. However, Microsoft removed from Word 2007 some of the template functionality in Word 2003. Whether Word 2010 restores this function remains to be seen.

Brian showed participants how to develop templates that incorporate styles, fields, autotext, customised toolbars and macros.

Feedback reports were very positive and several expressed an interest in the use of styles in Word. Brian is prepared to deliver a course on the use of styles in Word and will also repeat the templates course if there is enough interest. Please email Martin Holmes <martin.holmes-forte@bigpond.com> if you are interested in styles, or attending the templates course. If enough people are interested the Society will schedule the courses.

Martin Holmes

'Australian printing is food and getting butter'

The Editing Essentials course on Saturday 27 March met all expectations. Although the original presenter, Helen Topor, was unable to attend, Cathy Nicoll and Claudia Marchesi very capably stepped into the breach. Their presenting skills and wealth of practical knowledge made the morning most useful, stimulating and enjoyable.

In three hours, Cathy and Claudia took participants through levels of editing—copyediting, substantive editing, proofreading, style sheets, authorial queries and the editing framework.

Cathy included anecdotes from her own experience and we learned about the importance

of judgment, asking the right questions at the start of your editing brief, ways of tailoring the text to the needs of the target audience, and the complexities of working with designers. Importantly, participants did some practical exercises on a series of texts designed to challenge thinking.

Participants also had the opportunity to listen to and learn from other people already in the field. And finally, the lunch served at midday for those participating in the afternoon design course, was just right. Thank you CSE.

Kerrie Hayes

'Design essentials'

Were we unflummoxed, debaulted and combobulated? Maybe. But we were certainly entertained and informed by David Whitbread's overview of the interesting world of design. Design covers such a vast range of topics that his session was limited to an overview of only the more important aspects. He sought participants' views on their particular interests so his talk would meet those needs.

David highlighted the roles of designers and editors: designers look at the best way of getting attention to a product and separating it from other competing products, while editors look at the best way of getting a message across to an audience. Designers and editors work jointly to retain audience attention and maximise communication potential.

Other topics discussed included the concepts of legibility and readability; typeface choices and their impacts; publication format decisions; layout principles and hints for effective positioning of images; and use of colour and contrast in images and text.

David included short practical exercises for participants to gain an appreciation of key design elements and terminology, combined with valuable hints and humorous anecdotes from his personal experience in design.

Helen Lewis

May or might I have your attention, please?



When should we use *may* and when should we use *might*? Well, opinion varies, and it's difficult to consider either without also considering *can* versus *may* and *could* versus *might*.

What do these sentences mean to you?

- I can hold the torch for you.
- I may hold the torch for you.
- I might hold the torch for you.
- I could hold the torch for you.

To me, they mean the following:

- I am able to hold the torch for you—my hand is capable of gripping it and holding it steady.
- I've been given permission to hold the torch while you do the hard work.
- If you need a torch held for you, I'm a possible volunteer.
- I'm willing to save you from the effort of holding the torch if it will help you do the hard work.

My observation is that *may* is tending to give way to *can*, so that *can* now embodies the meaning *has permission to* on top of *is able to*. Likewise, I think *might* is tending to give way to *could*, except where strong doubt is intended.

How about the question form?

- Can I hold the torch for you?
- May I hold the torch for you?
- Might I hold the torch for you?
- Could I hold the torch for you?

My preference would be for *Can* or *May*, that is, I'm seeking permission. *Might* seems too formal, and *Could* would only be possible, to me, if there is emphasis on *I*, that is, there is a choice of people to hold the torch.

Pam Peters (Peters, 2007) suggests three main meanings for both *can* and *may*, with meaning shifting depending on context:

- be able to
- be allowed to
- be possible that.

I don't think *may* is used to express ability, but it can certainly express permission and possibility:

- You may come with us. (permission or possibility, depending on context)

Can is used in all three senses:

- You can use a razor blade (ability or permission) but please be careful. (possibility)

May these days is used when there is some sense of doubt or possibility—perhaps there is some hint of 'maybe'. It also seems to be more polite than *can*. Compare these sentences:

- Yes, you may go now.
- Yes, you can go now.

Another problem area is the meaning and use of *could* or *might* in sentences such as:

- Could I borrow that book when you've read it?
- Might I borrow that book when you've read it?

Here, *might* suggests a certain tentativeness.

Could is also the past tense of *can*:

- She could climb mountains when she was younger.

It's a vexed area. But English is full of vacillations between meanings and usages.

As an Englishperson living in Australia, I have a problem with the word *tea*. When someone invites me to *tea*, I have to ask whether they mean a cup of tea in the afternoon or an evening meal. In Australia *tea* can mean either, but most commonly the evening meal. In England, *tea* is still at 4 pm and the evening meal is *dinner* or *supper*.

I think I *may* just have stirred up a hornet's nest, but I hope you *can* get something out of this, and I just *might* write about some other problem areas another time.

Elizabeth Murphy

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Reference

Peters, Pam, 2007, *The Cambridge Guide to Australian English Usage*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

Special thanks to Elizabeth for coming out of her retirement to address, at my request, the confusion generated in some public service clients by this niggling shift in language use. Gil Garcon

It's a vexed area.
But English is full
of such vacillations
between meanings
and usages.





English alive: CSE or the CSE?

There is widespread use of initialisms with and without the definite article even within the same document.

Let's look at the shortened forms of Australian government departments and agencies. They are:

- acronyms (FaHCSIA, AusAID, DIAC) or
- abridgements (Finance, Customs) or
- initialisms (NHMRC, DSTO, DVA).

No one uses the definite article before the acronym or abridged form:

'ASIO is Australia's security service.' not
 'The ASIO is Australia's security service.'
 'The agency provides policy advice to
 Customs.' not 'The agency provides policy
 advice to the Customs.'

These forms are pronounceable and, therefore, are perceived as proper nouns and, like most proper nouns, do not contain the definite article.

There is no such consensus, however, when initialisms are used. From the February 2010 Senate Estimates:

Senator Lundy—I certainly would like to know how the women's national league is performing on ABC.

Mr Scott—Sure. The other thing I will add is that the ABC's commitment to sport does not just extend to television, of course.

Although both utterances are made in the same social context, one speaker uses the article before ABC and the other does not.

Mr Scott uses the article in a noun phrase, the ABC's commitment to sport, with ABC in the possessive case. Senator Lundy omits the article in a prepositional phrase, on ABC, with ABC in the objective case.

Perhaps the grammatical context determines whether the article is used.

However, a scan of government websites reveals initialisms with and without the definite article irrespective of grammatical structure:

AGS provides legal and related services in support of the full range of activities of Australian Government departments and agencies.

The AFRC aims to deliver the latest relevant research to family relationship service providers.

This reality has major implications for the costs of services delivered by DPS.

The portfolio is responsible for the investigation of all complaints received by the AFP.

I am proud of DHS's continued association with a community organisation, VISACT.

Traditionally, much of the CDPP's work has not involved crime directed at individual victims.

Perhaps writers' notions determine whether they use the article. I know of a manager in the Child Support Agency, for example, who intentionally uses the CSA in external correspondence but CSA in internal correspondence. It seems that when communicating with those who belong to the agency, she personalises the concept, seeing CSA as a name rather than an initialism, and so omits the article.

The co-occurrence of the CSE and CSE in one of our own articles may be similarly motivated:

The next meeting will be an informal session where we will gather ideas about how such a scheme could operate, and what would be the benefits to mentees, mentors, to CSE, and to the editing profession in general...

You should come to the meeting if you are new to the CSE and would like to make the most of your membership to expand your networks and develop your career.

In the first sentence the author is writing from the perspective of a long-term member and may be using CSE as a personalised name. In the second sentence the author is writing with new members in mind and may be using the CSE from a formal perspective.

The Senate Estimates example, however, contradicts this notional explanation: the senator says on ABC; the ABC representative says the ABC.

Given this mayhem, I suggest that we guardians of consistent style insert the definite article where it is omitted before initialisms in formal contexts.

Anne Reed

I suggest that we insert the definite article before initialisms in formal contexts.

PerfectIt—the editor’s friend



In my previous article on electronic editing, I mentioned that the ‘Copy editors and proofreaders’ group on LinkedIn had provided me with some valuable tools for speeding up electronic editing. In this article I focus on one of those tools—PerfectIt—the software package that I’ve found to be most useful and user-friendly.

Features of the program

Marketed by a company called Intelligent Editing (<http://www.intelligentediting.com/default.aspx>), *PerfectIt* is designed to pick up inconsistencies in a document. The blurb on the website explains that it checks for:

- consistent hyphenation and capitalisation
- list or bullet capitalisation and punctuation
- common typos
- abbreviation definitions
- capitalisation of headings
- consistent labelling of tables and figures.

PerfectIt can do other editing tasks; for example, it can generate a table of abbreviations, find and remove comments accidentally left in a document, accept track changes, update cross references and remove any double spaces. The program can also be modified for a particular house style.

By now you’re probably wondering what this leaves for the editor to do! In reality, copyediting is still best done manually, as I’ll explain below. But first, here is an example of how the program functions.

Example

Imagine that a document contains both ‘self-esteem’ and ‘self esteem’. It may be that both are correct (as in ‘self-esteem issues’ and ‘high self esteem’). Even so, the hyphenation may not always be applied correctly.

To check this, the editor opens *PerfectIt*, and a small dialogue box appears at the bottom of the screen. Clicking on ‘Start’ in this box causes the program to scan the document for problems (this generally takes a couple of minutes), and one of the things it picks up is the hyphenation

inconsistency in ‘self esteem’. As shown in the screen shot, the dialogue box provides a description of the error—‘A phrase is used with and without a hyphen/dash’—making it quite clear what issue the program has identified.

The dialogue box then provides an option to choose the preferred phrase. For example, the dialogue box shows ‘self-esteem’ used 17 times and ‘self esteem’ 3 times. The program selects the term used most frequently (i.e. ‘self-esteem’), and highlights all instances of the one it assumes is an error (i.e. ‘self esteem’), plus the surrounding text. The editor can then look through each instance, clicking on ‘Fix’ for those that are incorrect, and ignoring those that are okay.

The user also has the option of choosing ‘self-esteem’ as the preferred phrase, in which case the program will highlight all the uses of ‘self esteem’, and the user can again fix those that are incorrect. Helpfully, the program not only highlights the term in the dialogue box; it also moves through the text of the Word document, so that the screen shows the part of the text where the potential error is located. This makes it easy to see if, for example, the apparent misuse is actually part of a reference, and is therefore not to be changed.

As it works through different issues, the program will also pick up any uses of the term ‘selfesteem’ under a different error description—‘An individual word is used with and without a hyphen/dash’.

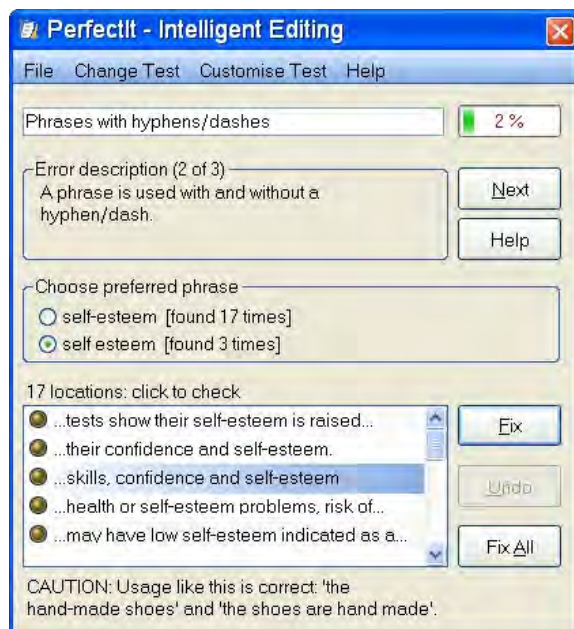
Putting the program into use

I tried running *PerfectIt* on an unedited document, but found the result rather overwhelming. Instead, I use it at the proofreading stage, running it as a final check to pick up anything I might have missed. It’s very satisfying to see the program speeding through its different functions and coming up with the message ‘Test passed!’ when it checks a particular issue and finds no errors.

Another thing I like to do is to generate an abbreviation list from *PerfectIt* and use that to double check the list that I have generated manually.

Note again that our April meeting will start at **6.00 pm sharp** in the theatrette of the National Library (one floor below the Friends’ Lounge).





Summing up

You can download *PerfectIt* and try it for free for 30 days. It is reasonably priced, easy to use and well worth investing in (and no, I'm not being paid for this endorsement, even though I probably sound like an advert for the software package!)

Hilary Cadman

IPEd Occasional papers series: Insights into editing 2010

IPEd is pleased to announce a call for papers in the first of its Occasional papers series, 'Insights into editing'.

This series aims to encourage editors and those working in editing-related fields to share their ideas, views and reflections on editing as theory, as practice and as a profession.

The theme for this round is 'Communicating in a technologised culture: the editor's role'.

Papers can be entertaining or erudite (though the best will be both). They can take any angle on the topic, but should engage with the contemporary editing scene in Australia or internationally.

Papers will be blind reviewed by a panel selected by the IPEd Council. The best papers will be published on the IPEd website.

The author of the best paper will receive a book token to the value of \$150.

Author guidelines

Format and presentation

Papers should:

- be 2000–2500 words in length
- include an abstract of 75–100 words
- include a cover sheet, containing author's name, address, email and phone number

- conform to APA style (see <http://www.apastyle.org>) for in-text referencing and reference list
- be in Microsoft Word, and use 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced.

Apart from on the title page, the author's name should **not** appear anywhere in the paper.

Evaluation criteria

The best papers will be:

- original, engaging and relevant
- organised clearly and coherently
- informed by relevant primary or secondary material
- well written and expertly edited.

Submission deadline

Papers should be sent as an attachment to ipedsecretary@gmail.com no later than 30 September 2010.

Announcement of winning papers

Details of the winning papers will be announced in November 2010.

Copyright

Papers submitted should not have been published in another forum, nor be under consideration for publication elsewhere at the time of submission to IPEd.

Ed Highley

The author of the best paper will receive a book token to the value of \$150.

Thinking about words: of prunes and pruning



Autumn is associated with a variety of garden activities, and *pruning* is very much to the forefront in my mind at the moment, as everything shrubby seems to have had a burst of growth since the March rains. The word is an odd one, when you think about it—what, if anything, do prunes and pruning have in common?

As we all know, prunes are dried plums. The plum tree's Latin name is *Prunus* and its fruit was a *prunum*, so no mystery there. The name came into English from the French, but in France a *prune* is just a plum and if you want to specify a dried one you call it a *pruneau*. Not everywhere—the French language always seems to have more exceptions than rules, and in some parts of the French-speaking world (in Switzerland, for example) a *pruneau* may be a fresh plum, and if you absolutely must have a prune you have to call it a *pruneau sec*.

Our word 'plum' reached us via Old English with links to Anglo-Saxon. Not surprisingly, it sounds close to the modern German *Pflaume*, although the experts also trace that back to *Prunus*, a name coming originally from Asia. An Asian provenance is true of the German words for cherry and peach, as well: *Kirsche* and *Pfirsich*, which began in Latin. These fruits reached Rome via its imperial conquests and were called *ceresia* and *persica*. The former supposedly took its name from the ancient city of Cerasus in Pontus (part of old Turkey), from which the celebrated epicure General Lucullus brought it back to Rome in the first century CE, and the latter from Persia (classical Latin had *persicum*, 'Persian', from which come German *Pfirsich*, French *pêche* and our peach). Incidentally, why do we hanker after a *plum* job? A 'plum' in the 17th and 18th centuries was a slang term for £100,000, then a considerable fortune, and now applied to anything particularly desirable.

It may surprise you that German looks back to Latin in these cases—we tend to think of the Teutonic languages having their own separate descent from Proto-Indo-European and so being insulated from Latin influences. However, Rome occupied much of Germany at the height of her empire, and the German language still retains about 500 words coming down from that time. Coming down from French, too—in the early half of the 17th century French was the language of polite

society in Germany, leaving rough old German to be spoken mainly by the working classes and the peasants. This was to be equally true in Russia two centuries later, with the aristocracy conversing in French even at the height of the Napoleonic wars and their aftermath.

We seem to be getting away from 'pruning'. You might guess that it began as a French word, but there's no connection with the fruit. In 15th century English it was spelt *prouyne*, and a century later *proine*—a 16th century gardening guide advises, 'Ye must proyne or cut the braunch off commonlye in winter'. The OED thinks it comes from Old French *proignier*, to prune or cut back the vine, but doubts a relation with modern *provigner*, meaning to layer the vine shoots. Nowadays the French say *tailler* for pruning a bush, and *émonder* or *élaguer* for cutting branches off something bigger. *Tailler* is also used for cutting pretty well anything else, from a moustache to a diamond, or even a suit—a *tailleur* is a tailor. The Romans did some pruning too, but they called it *putare*, whence *amputare*, lopping limbs off trees or people. Modern Italian has *potare*, which is close, and that is defined in my dictionary as '*tagliare i rami degli alberi*' (to trim the branches of the trees), the word *tagliare* sounding very like the French *tailler* and both coming from the medieval Latin *taliare*, 'to trim'.

The German for 'to prune' is *beschneiden*, (from *schneiden*, 'to cut'), but they make this verb do double service for what they primly describe as the 'ritual pruning of Jews and Moslems'.

We mentioned 'lopping' a few lines back. That's another mystery word with no known antecedents. It appears in the early 15th century as a noun, meaning the small branches and twigs trimmed from bushes and trees—'the Loppes and Croppes of Woode', and there was hot debate at the time as to whether they were liable for tithes. Curiously, in its early days lop meant a variety of different things, the earliest use apparently being for spiders and then, a little later, for fleas. Fleas leap, and there is a possible link with 'lop', but why on earth spiders? Well, we do have jumping spiders!...And so to lopping, which just meant cutting the lops and crops.

Why do we hanker after a plum job?
A 'plum' in the 17th and 18th centuries was a slang term for £100,000.



The word 'crop' also began as a noun, with its origins in the old German word *Kropf*, meaning any kind of swelling; today applied equally to goitre or to the crop of a bird. From there, in Old English, it progressed to anything rounded – the top of a head or the top of a tree—and then to the tops of anything edible, the produce of the field. From there the verb developed, to remove any of these: bits of tree, bush, or any other plant.

Or we might clip our bushes, cutting them with scissors or shears, and the word 'clip' mimics the sound of the shears (as does 'snip'). Our aim is to make them trim and tidy, and 'trim' has a history of many meanings, beginning with preparing an army for battle, then getting anything ready for use, so by extension trimming your beard or putting lace on your dress, and so to neatening your plants—or adjusting the ballast to make sure your ship is on an even keel. All these meanings were in use before the end of the 16th century, and long before there was any question of trimming an aircraft for level flight.

If you are into virtuoso pruning you may try your hand at topiary, 'clipping and trimming shrubs into ornamental or fantastic shapes'. The noun 'topiary' is an early 20th century invention from a much older Latin adjective *topiarius*, 'to do with ornamental gardening'; it goes back ultimately to the Greek word *topia*, 'a field', the diminutive of *topos*, 'a place', the element we see in words like topology or topography. But all this lopping, clipping and trimming is hard on muscles you never suspected you had, and it's probably a good point at which to come in, read the gardening catalogues and have a long cold beer.

Peter Judge

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The triple-underlined e featured in this issue might become our logo. David Whitbread suggested it during his last workshop. Your committee supports the idea and is looking at a new masthead for the newsletter as well. What do you think?

The Canberra editor April 2010

19th year • volume 19 • number 3
ISSN 1039-3358

© Canberra Society of Editors 2010.

Published by the Canberra Society of Editors
PO Box 3222 Manuka ACT 2603

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Edited and typeset by Gil Garcon with *i.Pages*
Proofread by Kerie Newell

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