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THE CANBERRA

# editor

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Volume 20 • Number 4

July–August 2012

next meeting

29 August  
6.00 for 6.30 pm

AGM  
and  
'Forensic linguistics  
and voice biometrics  
in Australia:  
distinguishing myth  
from reality'  
(see page 7 for  
details)

## President's report

*'The time has come,' the Walrus said,  
'To talk of many things:  
Of shoes – and ships – and sealing-wax –  
Of cabbages – and kings –  
And why the sea is boiling hot –  
And whether pigs have wings.'*

Thus wrote Lewis Carroll in his poem 'The walrus and the carpenter' from 'Through the looking-glass and what Alice found there' (1872). I'm reminded of it because this is my last 'President's Report' and I too want to 'talk of many things'.

It has been a privilege to lead the team for a few months. The committee could be forgiven for thinking that I've been pretty demanding, but they've gone along with a number of things on my 'wish list' and added more. The upshot is that we are well on the way to all key persons on the committee having a deputy who can take over when they are away so that business continues and updates happen whether one person is on holiday or not. The world of communication has shrunk to the size of a microchip and we are part of it, like it or not. We have to look professional at all times, particularly in our public performance: that is, in our newsletter, on our website and in our dealings with other editing societies and contacts around the world.

Alongside this, our professionalism is becoming more and more a matter for personal consideration. We may be full-time, in-house editors or we may be editing occasionally at home, or anything in between, but we all need to present a professional image. As more and more editors seek accreditation of their skills, the time will come, if it hasn't already, when employers will prefer accredited editors over those who are not accredited. This is no different from the way clients have for years preferred accredited accountants, builders, doctors and consultants in most professions. Our Society has been active in the promotion of accreditation for editors and this year's workshops in preparation for the upcoming IPEd accreditation exams (on 18 and 25 August) will be comprehensive and helpful to prospective candidates. See Page 2 of this newsletter and the Society website for details.

I had an opportunity to attend an IPEd Council teleconference on your behalf, standing in for our Councillor Cathy Nicoll. It gave me an appreciation of the value of having such a central body. We need to support it, promote it, make good use of it and help it to support the individual member societies. We are urged by IPEd to promote accreditation where possible. Those of us who are AEs or DEs are asked to use the postnominals in our signature blocks. It may be useful to write them out in full as well until clients understand what they mean.

In the last few months we have moved from a monthly newsletter to a bi-monthly one, with more up-to-the-minute material now appearing on the website and in emails to members. It's the way of other editing organisations around the world. This is only the start of the communication change we need to be part of this electronic age. We have recently taken steps to see that we are equipped to offer our guest speakers at regular general meetings the facility to show PowerPoint slideshows and to provide access to the internet—both direct from a laptop to a 'smart' TV screen.

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It has been fortuitous that I have had the opportunity to liaise personally with the Professional Editors' Group (PEG) in South Africa during these few months. I spent two weeks visiting Cape Town and Johannesburg and conducting master classes for practising editors there. I have been invited to return to present two more classes in October. To cater for the need to have *Working words* available there, PEG was licensed to print a number of copies, a brave and successful venture for the Society. We now have a good relationship with PEG as well as with the Society for Editors and Proofreaders (SFEP) in the UK, whose conference in York in September will be attended by me and other members of our Society.

What of the future? Editing is not only 'here to stay'; it's an essential part of the publishing and business writing and academic scene. It's not too fanciful to predict that the day is fast approaching when everyone writing anything will automatically think about engaging an editor from the start of the project. 'Pigs might fly', you say. Well, perhaps Carroll's fantasy question of 'whether pigs have wings' will be answered.

To help the move into the future, we are setting up a mentoring program that I hope will appeal to new members and to editors wanting to refresh their skills after an absence. You will hear more of this in emails, on the website and in future newsletters. And here seems a good place to welcome new members to the Society: Cheney Brew, Dr Sonja Chandler, Maren Child, Joan Foster, Clive Johnson, Kerry Malone, Penny O'Hara, Bernadette O'Leary, Col Roberts, Moira Smith, Denise Sutherland, Alisa Welch and Mike Wilkins. A warm welcome to you all.

I will be stepping down as President at our Annual General Meeting on Wednesday 29 August. As has been the practice in recent years, we are arranging a dinner with a guest speaker to follow the business meeting, and we hope that you will stay for this. Please watch the website for booking details and for plans for future meetings and speakers.

I want to thank sincerely the committee who worked hard with me over these last five months. We move on from here to working with new technology in new meeting premises, new programs for people new to the profession, and soon a new committee to guide it all for another year.

**Elizabeth Manning Murphy DE**

## Training news

Looking for the latest insights into editing—both on screen and in print? For full details of the training program, check out Training 2012 on the Canberra Society of Editors' website: < <http://www.editorscanberra.org/> >.

Send your comments or suggestions to:

Connie Stamos  
CSE Training Coordinator  
conniestamos@gmail.com

It's time to sort out your training for this season and make use of the worthwhile resources that come with CSE membership.

### Upcoming courses

#### **IPed accreditation exam preparation (two-part workshop)**

Dates: Part I: 18 August 2012 (1–3.30 pm)

Part II: 25 August 2012 (1–4.30 pm)

Our expert panel of editors and presenter Malini Devadas AE (Biotext) are all set to deliver our IPed accreditation preparation sessions in August, in time for the exam on October 13.

Day One will involve a two-hour Q&A with our guest panel—Elizabeth Manning—

Murphy DE, Karin Hosking AE, Dallas Stow AE, Chris Pirie DE, Virginia Wilton DE, Ted Briggs AE and Malini Devadas AE.

Day Two will be a half-day workshop, which will include insights into editing, tips on learning resources and exam strategy, interesting practical exercises, and opportunities for networking and mentoring. You don't want to miss out on this one! More information about how to best prepare for the workshop will be sent to participants closer to the time.

### ***Mastering markup (PDF): XML publishing for editors (full-day workshop)***

Date: Saturday 22 September 2012

Dave Gardiner will introduce the basics of digital publishing using entry-level desktop publishing software. This course is designed to familiarise editors with the editing and typesetting potential of XML software.

This fast-paced, practical workshop will cover the concepts of, and common issues in, XML editing. Using open-source XML and popular commercial software, participants will gain a greater understanding of converting material to XML, tagging content, editing and using design stylesheets to produce PDF ebooks.

Course materials will be made available before the workshop and will allow participants to continue learning XML markup after the course. A suite of typesetting templates and a practical user's guide are bonus materials to help kick-start desktop production. (Note: This workshop covers only PDF output; a separate workshop is being developed for EPUB and web ebooks).

Before registering, and to gain maximum benefit from the workshop, prospective participants must download an information sheet that covers prerequisite topics (including computer hardware and software, systems requirements, and work to be completed on an ebook one month before the workshop).

Morning and afternoon tea, and lunch included.

### ***Grammar in a Nutshell (half-day workshop)***

Date: Saturday 3 November 2012

Elizabeth Manning Murphy, the author of *Working words* and current CSE President, will present this course on the essentials of grammar and the conventions used to make text acceptable. Please note the change of date.

A good, clear understanding of language and logical language structure: let's face it, this is the ultimate editing tool. With her recent stupendous book sales and workshop success in South Africa, Elizabeth will make sure that this year's professional development for editors goes out with a bang!

Morning tea included.

### **Connie Stamos**

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## Accreditation exam date announced

The fourth IPEd accreditation exam will be held on Saturday 13 October 2012. As with the previous three exams, this will be a pen (or pencil) and paper exam.

Passing the IPEd accreditation exam demonstrates an editor's professional competence and understanding of editing standards, skills and knowledge.

The exam costs \$540 (with no GST applicable) for financial members of societies of editors and \$690 for non-members or those who are not financial at the close of the registration period. Exam fees may be tax deductible.

Registration for the exam closes on Friday 14 September 2012. To register, complete the application form on the IPEd website <<http://tinyurl.com/bomd5nv>> and ensure that your application is accompanied by the relevant fee.

The fee has been calculated as the minimum required to cover exam costs in 2012. It is based on a target number of applicants and, if this target is not reached, the Accreditation Board will postpone the exam until 2013. There is no limit to the number of candidates who may sit the exam; all candidates who register and pay the fee will be accommodated.

Two sample exams are available from the IPEd website, with answer guides. Both sample exams <<http://tinyurl.com/7th57xx>> are good indicators of what you can expect in October, and trialling them will help you decide whether you are ready for the real thing. It is recommended that you not attempt the exam unless you have at least three years' full-time professional editing experience. All societies of editors will be organising pre-exam activities to help prepare candidates.

To obtain further information, contact your Accreditation Board delegate <<http://tinyurl.com/czcr5e9>> or consult the guidelines for candidates and FAQs <<http://tinyurl.com/c3lzho2>>.

# May meeting: *The Editor's Companion*— Take 2

A wintry night in late May did not deter the largest general meeting turnout of CSE members for a very long time. The reason? To meet our guest, Janet Mackenzie, Distinguished Editor and acclaimed author of *The Editor's Companion*, and to listen to an informative and entertaining talk based around her second edition of this almost legendary text, published in 2011.

Janet calls it a 'humorous textbook'—passionate and lively, with anecdotes and humour aplenty, which she believes can convey messages more memorably than does 'magisterial writing'.

I say that Janet's talk was 'based around' the book because, apart from a brief opening summary of what is not in the second edition—notably, the *Australian Standards of Editing Practice* (under review), and a detailed guide to onscreen editing (too big a task, plus (modestly) lack of expertise)—and of what has been added—notably, a lot more about e-books, single source publishing, digital rights, a new glossary and a guide to proof correction and text mark-up symbols—Janet gave us her insights into how society is changing the way it communicates, and what that might mean for the work of editors.

Janet believes the World Wide Web is changing our culture in ways that most of us are barely aware of, particularly those of us who grew up on a longstanding diet of books, papers, radio, TV and the telephone. The online community, where 'choice is but a finger away', is apparently characterised by short attention span, wandering focus and isolation, and is not conducive to deep thought and reflection. It is faster, shallower, wider, and more lightweight. BUT it is also dynamic and interactive, especially with readers.

Janet's questions for editors to consider include: 'With whom and with what do we want to interact?' (for example, academic works or annual reports or fiction readers, etc) and 'Are we creating publications, or building online communities?' Janet talked about some of the commercial, technological and legal issues we should contemplate as we grapple with these questions.

Commercial issues include having to deal with new business models, such as pay-per-view, subscriptions, different licensing and print-on-demand. Her biggest shock story was that a book of blank pages is on Amazon's Top 50 list!

E-readers and e-books are the focus of the technological issues. E-books so far work okay for linear reading, and can even be read on mobile phones. But they are still fairly primitive, and will not supplant real paper books for some time yet.

Among the legal issues, Janet listed intellectual property, digital rights, moral rights and piracy, but she wonders whether the constraints that publishers are increasingly placing on e-books may become counterproductive.

To give us a 'taste' of the style and tone of her second edition, Janet read an interesting passage about verisimilitude. You can find it on page 72 in Chapter 4 on Substance and Structure.

Janet concluded with the exciting news that her book now has a companion website, <<http://tinyurl.com/c56tmup>>, which has numerous practice exercises—great for freelancers.

The lively discussion on several matters raised by members had recurrent themes about what Janet likes to edit, what it's like to be subject to a copy edit ('illuminating'), and what is not negotiable in an editor's dealings with authors.

Our dinner with Janet afterwards at 'Boffins' was most enjoyable. My first experience of this restaurant, which is apparently one of our President's favourites. It was a great evening all round.

**Alan Cummine**

# June meeting

There was an excellent turnout for the June general meeting, despite a chilly evening and an unfamiliar location. We welcomed our president, Elizabeth Manning Murphy, back from her triumphant South African trip, and also enjoyed mingling with members of the Australian and New Zealand Society of Indexers (ANZSI) in our annual joint meeting.

Guest speaker Dr Tim Sherratt described himself, rather tantalisingly, as a 'digital historian, cultural data hacker and freelance troublemaker'. Tim provided his avid listeners with a whirlwind introduction to the world of digital humanities. He described the Trove newspaper archive (<http://trove.nla.gov.au/>) as a magnificent resource, and went on to demonstrate some of the weird and wonderful ways it can be interrogated to gather and analyse historical data. While Trove uses optical character recognition (OCR) to translate images and thus can be quite error-ridden, users can correct material, and the quality will improve as technology continues to develop.

Tim noted that there is a strong, supportive community in the digital humanities. People share resources generously, and they regularly hold informal, collaborative 'unconferences' (<http://thatcamp.org/>) where practitioners meet up to solve problems and learn from each other. He also described and demonstrated a range of handy tools for exploring historical data, including QueryPic (<http://wraggelabs.com/shed/querypic/>), Google Ngram Viewer (<http://books.google.com/ngrams/>), bookworm on Open Library (<http://bookworm.culturomics.org/>), and—for the serious techies—MALLET topic modelling (<http://mallet.cs.umass.edu>).

Digital tools offer many new ways to explore historic material, and inspire us to think about it in new ways. Tim also shared a project that is clearly close to his heart. Together with his partner Dr Kate Bagnall, he has been researching the lives of non-Europeans who lived in Australia while the White Australia policy was in force. They are using biographical information held in government archives to piece together the tales of these 'invisible Australians'.

Tim was a fascinating and engaging speaker and I'm sure he opened our eyes to many new research possibilities. I suspect the whole audience went away itching to try some of the links he provided. Here are a few:

<http://discontents.com.au>—Tim's blog on online history resources

<http://wraggelabs.com/emporium/>— 'digital tools for discerning historians'

<http://invisibleaustralians.org/>—information about life under the White Australia policy

If you missed Tim's talk, he has kindly made his presentation available for download from <http://www.slideshare.net/wragge>. Enjoy!

**Karin Hosking AE**

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## XML markup: From Word to XML to PDF

A digital publishing workflow based on XML is largely designed as a complete, self-contained production system, and setting up the correct software is the first step. In this article, **Dave Gardiner** outlines how to set up an XML editor to produce markup and a transformation processor to produce PDF documents. Then follows a series of exercises to introduce XML markup.

Setting up an XML editor

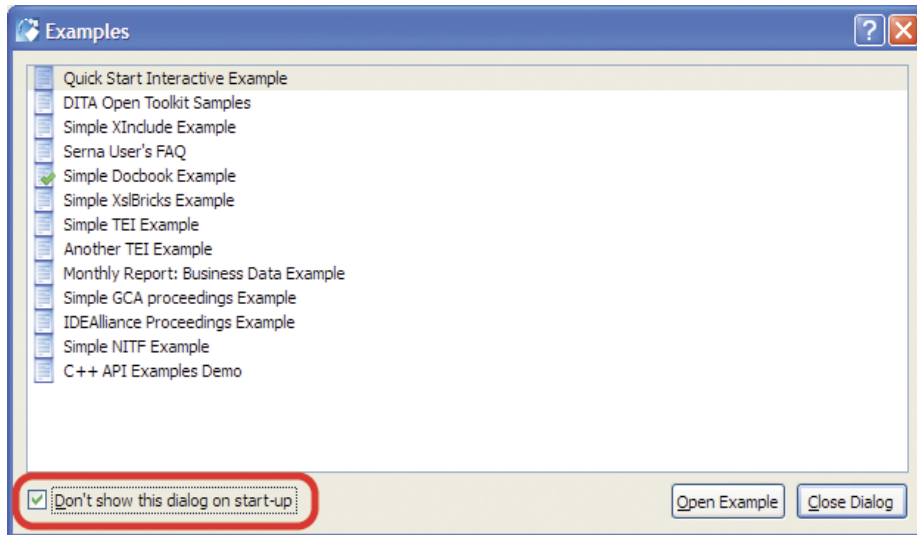
For the exercises in this article, you will need to download and install a free XML editor called Serna Free 4.4.

Exercise: Installing Serna

1. In a web browser, go to <http://downloads.syntext.com/serna-free/4.4.0-RELEASE/>. This has different versions for Windows, Macintosh or Linux operating systems.
2. Download the respective file for your computer (.exe, .dmg or linux.tgz). Save the file to your desktop or a convenient temporary directory. Double-click on the downloaded file and follow the instructions at each step to set up the software. You can choose to set up the software files in the Program Files directory (C:/Program Files) or another convenient directory that you have

permission to access. Use all the default settings in the screen 'Select Additional Tasks'.

3. In the final screen, click on Install. That will launch Serna. When Serna starts, a window titled Examples may appear. At the lower left, click on the checkbox 'Don't show this dialog on startup'.



4. In your file manager, create a directory (for example, under the C:/ drive) in which to put the XML files that you will create in the exercises. Name this directory xmlfiles.

Read the rest of this article at <http://tinyurl.com/7k5n87r>.

Got a question? Post it at <http://tinyurl.com/7yqk4q8>.

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## What's in a name?

Earlier this year there was a spirited discussion about outsourced proofreading at one of the CSE meetings. It seems that *The Canberra Times* (now owned by Fairfax) no longer has Canberra-based proofreaders, but sends material to a company called Pagemasters (<http://pagemasters.com>) for checking. The general consensus was that standards had fallen. I'd noticed a similar lack of attention to detail in various other Fairfax papers, and sometimes even used them to practice my proofreading symbols while preparing for the accreditation exam back in May.

I was again reminded of outsourced or perhaps just non-existent proofreading while browsing a paper copy of *The Sydney Morning Herald* last month. A brief article about the late writer Stieg Larsson's partner Eva Gabrielsson managed to spell the mass murderer Anders Breivik's surname three different ways (Breivik, Breikvik and Brevik) in a single paragraph. While we've come to expect sloppy attention to detail in online publishing it was a shock to see this level of carelessness in a hard copy, and indeed in a newspaper with a fairly good reputation. After reading the article I dashed off a letter to the editor pointing out all the spelling errors. The following morning this reply landed in my inbox – shown verbatim, for your amusement:

'Dear Karen,

Recently you contacted ReaderLink about the story, "The woman with a book of her own".

At Herald Publications we want to be an accurate and reliable source of information. Unfortunately, errors do occur. Our aim is to reduce the number of errors and publish corrections when appropriate.

The information ReaderLink has in response to your report is as follows:

Thank you for your email our Letters Editor has forwarded your message about the spelling mistakes in The Diary story 'The woman with a book of her own'. We value reader feedback. We sincerely regret the errors. We have corrected the story.

Regards,

Ben & Peter'

Sure enough, the story (online, at least) had been corrected. But I found it hilarious that the authors didn't even bother to spell my name correctly in their reply.

**Karen Karyn Karin Hosking**

# Notice of annual general meeting

Date: Wednesday 29 August

Location: Drawing Room, University House, Balmain Crescent, ANU

## Agenda

6.00–6.30 Welcome drinks

6.30–7.30 AGM

7.30–8.30 Speaker – Dr Paul Sidwell

1. Minutes of AGM held on 28 September 2011
2. Business arising
3. President's report
4. Treasurer's report
5. Secretary's report
6. Membership report
7. Training report
8. Other committee members' reports
9. Special resolution and motions

## Notice of special resolution

That Rule 3, sub-rule 1, of the constitution be amended so that 'Full member' is replaced by 'Professional member' and that related wording elsewhere in the CSE constitution reflect this amendment. (Moved Margaret Millard, seconded Martin Holmes).

Reason for the special resolution: The descriptor 'full member' has only limited intrinsic meaning. The descriptor 'professional member' is self-evidently descriptive, is linked to the criteria prescribed by the CSE constitution, and more readily differentiates between 'professional member' and 'associate member'.

Note: Section 1 of the CSE constitution provides that a special resolution is required to alter the society's constitution. For a special resolution to be passed, three-quarters of the CSE's members must support the special resolution either at a general meeting (in this case the AGM), or by proxy.

## Forensic linguistics and voice biometrics in Australia: distinguishing myth from reality

### *The topic*

Forensic linguistics is a diverse field that not only has applications in legal and criminal investigation, but also makes important contributions to the military, government and business, and can contribute to literary, historical and cultural studies. The challenge is to find specifically individuating information—whether in an audio recording or a written text—be it a murder inquiry or a dispute over who wrote Shakespeare's plays. Forensic science is now well entrenched in popular culture, but the stories and events we see on our screen have little to do with reality and more to do with validating non-scientific thinking. In this talk I unpick some of the myths of popular culture and take you behind the scenes.

### *The speaker*

Dr Paul Sidwell is a senior lecturer in linguistics at the ANU, teaching phonetics and forensic linguistics, and consults as a forensic expert for the NSW Police. He also has a substantial interest in Mainland Southeast Asian languages and directs several research projects hosted by the Centre for Research in Computational Linguistics in Bangkok. Paul is also actively involved in academic publishing, being Managing Editor for *Asia-Pacific Linguistics* at ANU and also edits the *Journal of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society* and *Mon-Khmer Studies*. He has lived in Canberra since 1999, after graduating from the University of Melbourne.



## Spread the word about the Perth editors conference in 2013



We have four fabulous keynote speakers confirmed for the conference: Don Watson, Dr Carmen Lawrence, Nury Vittachi and Will Yeoman. We have details of all keynote speakers on our website, and now have posted costs for members and non-members to attend (under Program overview).

Being 10 months away from our national editors conference, we on the conference committee are concentrating on ramping up our marketing efforts.

You can help! You don't even have to leave your office! Here are some suggestions about how you can help us promote the conference:

1. Have a link to the conference in your email signature. You can just add this to your own signature: **6th IPEd National Editors Conference, Perth 2013 | [www.ipedperth2013.com.au](http://www.ipedperth2013.com.au)**
2. You could send an email to all your email contacts asking them to sign up for our monthly eNewsletter which is due very soon (make sure you've signed up to this as well). Text could be: **Find out about the Perth editors conference by signing up to receive our monthly eNewsletter or go to our conference website at [www.ipedperth2013.com.au](http://www.ipedperth2013.com.au).**

3. When you receive the eNewsletter, forward it to your contacts.
4. You could share these links on your Facebook/Twitter/LinkedIn pages/profiles and share any news that's posted by others.
5. You could put a link to the conference on your own website.
6. You could distribute our media release.

That's enough for now. We'll have more ideas soon... stay tuned and keep informed!

### Links and email contacts

Conference website: [www.ipedperth2013.com.au](http://www.ipedperth2013.com.au)

Sign up for our eNewsletter: [www.ipedperth2013.com.au/?page\\_id=6](http://www.ipedperth2013.com.au/?page_id=6)

Twitter: [@editorswa](https://twitter.com/editorswa) Hashtag: [#ipedcon2013](https://twitter.com/hashtag/ipedcon2013)

Facebook: [SocietyofEditorsWA](https://www.facebook.com/SocietyofEditorsWA)

LinkedIn: [Society of Editors \(WA\) Inc](https://www.linkedin.com/company/SocietyofEditors(WA)Inc)

Post a photo using Twitpic (see our website)

Contact conference organiser, Livia Russell: [promaco@promaco.com.au](mailto:promaco@promaco.com.au)

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## IPEd Notes

### News from the Institute of Professional Editors Limited

[iped-editors.org](http://iped-editors.org)

May-June 2012

The IPEd Council met twice during the period covered by these notes, on 6 May and 10 June. Both meetings were by teleconference.

#### ***Date of next accreditation exam announced***

IPEd's Accreditation Board (AB) has announced that its fourth accreditation exam will be held on Saturday 13 October 2012. Registration details are on the [IPEd website](http://www.ipedperth2013.com.au) and have been sent to all society newsletter editors and web minders. Passing the IPEd accreditation exam demonstrates an editor's professional competence and understanding of editing standards, skills and knowledge. Getting 'AE' after your name is a big thing.

As for past exams, all the societies will be running preparatory workshops for exam candidates (see Page 2 of this newsletter). Also, there are two sample exams available from the IPEd website. They are very good indicators of what you can expect in October, and trialling them will help you to decide whether you are ready for the real thing.



An interesting twist is that an Australian temporarily resident in Spain wishes to sit the exam there. The logistics are challenging, but the AB is confident that it can pull it off.

## **Revision of the Australian Standards for Editing Practice**

The hard-working team headed by Kerry Davies AE is approaching the final stages of its work to produce a new edition of ASEP that takes account of the substantial changes to editing practice that have occurred since the first edition was published in 2001. Confidence is building that we will be able to release the new edition, online and in print, in the early second half of this year.

## **Professional development**

Two IPEd-supported workshops will be held over the next few months. On 28 July, Pam Peters DE (NSW) will present her respected 'Grammar essentials' workshop for members of the Tasmanian society. It's traffic both ways: on 13 August, Elizabeth Spiegel AE (Tasmania) will travel to Sydney to present a specialist workshop on 'Editing for the web' for NSW society members. IPEd is supporting these events by funding the associated travel and accommodation costs. It has budgeted for five such events during 2012–13 so, if there is a workshop topic that interests you, start lobbying your committee and IPEd Councillor. Society members can view the wide range of [opportunities](#) on the website.

## **'When is a quote an under-quote'**

Freelancers will be interested in a lively discussion on this topic on the IPEd website forum; further contributions welcome. In our unregulated world, how much we should charge for our editing services is a perennial question. A plumber might get \$100 appearance money and \$80 per hour after that, while it's said that there are 'editors' working for as little as \$20–30 an hour. It's not that plumbers are overpaid; it's that editors, even the professionals, are often underpaid. The question 'why' is multifaceted.

The forum was stimulated by an article by Renée Otmar DE and others on the topic '[Competitive quoting, freelance rates and ethical practice in freelance editing](#)' that appeared in the April issue of *Offpress*, the Queensland society's newsletter and a [free-ranging response](#) by Helena Bond AE in the May issue. You can read both articles online on the IPEd website at the links above.

## **2013 National Conference**

Don't leave it too late to capture those cheap flights to and from Perth to attend the 5th National Editors Conference in Fremantle on 10–13 April 2013. Impressive keynote speakers have been engaged: Don Watson and Carmen Lawrence probably need no introduction; Nury 'Mr Jam' Vittachi is 'Asia's funniest, most pungent columnist and author'; William Yeoman is Books Editor and Senior Arts Writer for the West Australian, and also writes for the Gramophone and International Record Review, as well as ABC Classic FM's Limelight magazine. Their presentations promise to be stimulating and informative in diverse ways.

You can access all the conference information at the [conference website](#) and sign up to receive updates via email.

And, of course, the organising committee is also eager to receive a wide range of contributions from members of our profession; there's an abstract submission form on the site.

## **IPEd on Twitter and Facebook**

You can now follow IPEd on [Twitter](#) (@IPeditors) or Friend IPEd on [Facebook](#). Don't just watch us; add a comment!

**Ed Highley**

**Secretary**

**secretary[at]iped.org**

# The pursuit of excellence

***In memory of the late Tom Cooper, General Secretary, who stood firmly for the pursuit of excellence.***

For as long as I can remember, I have never been satisfied with second best. I have always wanted to do the best I could at everything, and I have always encouraged others to do their best too. These days, my efforts are concentrated in the editing profession, and I am about to travel to South Africa to run some seminars which I have entitled "Master editing"—yes, there is some deliberate ambiguity there! In one sense, I'm asking people to master their editing skills and the conventions that go with editing at any level in order to be considered editors at all. In another sense, I'm saying that these seminars are about the level of editing skill that real masters of their craft need to understand and practise in order to be considered the best editors in their field.

A good deal of the editing I do is in the academic field: editing theses and journal articles for scholarly publications. Sometimes the theses are written by people for whom English is not their first language, and one such is worthy of note. I was confronted with a thesis written by a qualified medical practitioner, with two university degrees already, now going for a PhD. This person is from an Asian background, so I fully expected to have to fix all the misuse or absence of articles a/an and the, put prepositions into the text where appropriate and sort out verb tenses. I wasn't prepared for the plethora of ambiguous and incredibly long sentences—the thesis was indecipherable in its current state. So I had no option but to get it completely rewritten before I attempted to edit it. To his credit, the author quickly saw that he needed help, so I took off my editor's hat and donned my teacher's hat and gave him a few lessons in grammar and plain English. He has now started to send me chapters of his rewritten thesis—they contain sentences of reasonable length, with no ambiguity, and a bit better control over the use of articles, not to mention the many other grammatical conventions that were totally foreign to him and to the grammar of his first language. When I asked him how he felt about rewriting everything, he told me that he was no longer satisfied with the standard of his writing in English, but wanted it to be the best English possible, and he was prepared to work at it to reach that excellence that he aspired to.

How do our home-grown students stack up against such dedication? The world of the young student in Australia, as in almost any other part of the world, is seen through the computer screen, the electronic book reader, the mobile phone and other electronic devices. I sometimes wonder if they ever have conversations (except in the telegraphic form of the text message), or write letters to their mothers when they travel, or know how to write an essay in a form that the rest of us can understand. Everything they want to do can be done online—no need for phone calls, letters, cheque books. They can live entirely inside their own heads, sitting all day at a computer, both for work and entertainment. The so-called 'Gen Y' has a reputation for being notoriously bad at relationships, living in a 'me first' world, caring not a jot for working at a project—wanting everything 'now'. But every generation goes through some sort of rebellion against societal norms—they all eventually grow up, and, like my PhD candidate, realise that there is something better 'out there' than what they'd been satisfied with.

Enter the pursuit of excellence! The Commercial Education Society of Australia has always espoused the pursuit of excellence in commercial education. The candidates for our certificates of achievement in a number of subjects aren't satisfied with being labelled merely 'competent'—they want to know whether they have performed to a credit standard or are worthy of a high distinction for their effort. It is personally satisfying to have tried hard and been rewarded with a high grade after an examination. It spurs you on to even greater efforts at work and in your personal life. It can even be the winning edge in the fierce competition these days for jobs.

No wonder CESA has been doing what it does, and surviving where others have disappeared, for over 100 years. CESA itself has always pursued excellence—excellence in the setting of relevant examinations, excellence in the example it sets for other educational bodies around Australia and the Pacific, excellence in its own administration of itself, and excellence in the personal qualities of the teachers, writers, administrators and so on who have had the good fortune to be part of it. I have been part of CESA for more than 50 years, part of that time as President, and several years when I was involved in getting the 'excellence' message across to people in certain Pacific countries. During that time, I have written a number of books on aspects of commercial studies, writing, editing and job-hunting. The latest is *Working words*,

published in 2011 by the Canberra Society of Editors. The influence of CESA is evident in everything I do, including in that book, which is now in a second printing in South Africa where I will continue my own pursuit of excellence and try to encourage it in the participants, all working editors, who are booking up for my seminars in that country. After all, doesn't the idea of 'master editing' include 'pursue excellence in editing'.

**Elizabeth Manning Murphy DE**

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