

**Next meeting**  
**Wednesday 25 June**  
**6pm**

### **Focus group results**

At our next meeting we will present the results of the focus groups that Joe Massingham has conducted on our behalf.

The purpose of these focus groups was to get frank and honest feedback about how the society can improve its service to members. We will look at what the feedback has been and discuss 'Where to from here?'

This will be an exciting opportunity to contribute to future directions of the society, so please come along.

As usual, we will meet in the Friends Lounge at the National Library at 6.00 pm for networking and a 6.30 pm start.

**Next training session**  
**Saturday 12 July**

This web writing workshop is limited to 20 participants. Details page 2 bookings page 8.

**AGM**  
**Saturday 2 August**  
**11am**

With lunch and guest speaker Kathy Golski. Details page 5.

**Canberra Society of Editors Newsletter**  
Vol 17 • Number 5 • June 2008

## **Writer and editor: Ian Howie-Willis**

At our last meeting Ian Howie-Willis recounted how he became an editor from being a writer of history. Fascinated by history since childhood, he later developed a lifelong commitment to the use of correct grammar and punctuation and to the precise use of vocabulary to convey the exact intended meaning.

Ian first worked as a cadet reporter and learnt to:

- write short, direct sentences, always in the active voice
- type fast and accurately, without rewrites
- get the facts right, double-check them and answer all the implicit questions in the story.

After completing university, Ian taught in high schools where producing school magazines provided his first lessons in editorial work:

- how to persuade contributors to meet deadlines
- how to correct their flawed prose without implicit criticism
- how to reduce the length of articles which are invariably too long.

In 1974 Melbourne University Press published Ian's first thesis. His editor showed him that the editor is an ally and should be trusted. She taught him how a good editor works:

- suggesting improvements while retaining the author's style

- saving authors embarrassment by getting them to check facts that could be wrong
- picking up errors that would discredit authors and books.

The editor of his second book showed Ian that a good editor is an encourager, not a nit-picker.

Ian became an editor while in the public service. Later, as editor of academic journals, Ian developed a few rules of thumb:

- Deal politely but firmly with academic prima donnas.
- Overcome academic supervisors who, while expert, want authors to rewrite articles to their personal satisfaction.
- Affirm the authors while improving their prose.
- Encourage younger authors.

Ian also believes the academic editor's role is to:

- keep the authors focussed and out of ideological blind alleys
- persuade authors to write in the voice with which they speak rather than in a convoluted polemical academic style
- convince authors that their personal experiences are of more interest than their theoretical analysis.

After writing 17 books, Ian knows that no matter how good authors might think they are, their book will be better if independently edited.

*Gil Garcon*

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## Web writing workshop with Simon Hillier

Simon Hillier, one of Australia's most experienced web copywriters and trainers, is presenting a workshop for us on Saturday 12 July.

This practical, interactive and engaging workshop will present you with information, guidance, tips and language tools to improve your understanding of:

- how and why people read and absorb information in a different way online
- the most effective ways to reach and communicate with your audience
- techniques that encourage readers to take appropriate action.

The workshop focuses on common principles that apply particularly to government online writing—because most of our clients are government departments or organisations associated with government.

### Understanding web copywriting

- How the unique challenges and opportunities of the internet have changed the nature of publication, how audiences read and how we write
- Writing for your audience, your company and for search engines
- The variety of websites being used for different purposes and what makes a good or bad web page or online article
- Writing that speaks to your readers' level of experience, core beliefs, feelings and needs

### Researching, planning and structuring your web copy

- Page layout, fonts and things to look out for
- How to improve the search engine ranking of your site through copy
- How to write effective copy for the web using keywords, headlines, subheadings, and hyperlinks
- Formatting your paragraphs—length, sentence structure, inverted pyramid style, 'chunking', pacing, bullet points and more
- Other important web copy elements such as titles, metatags, and ALT tags
- Writing techniques to help drive action—enquiries, downloads, subscriptions, enrolments, etc—and build credentials
- Using downloadable forms such as information sheets and brochures

### Increasing your website traffic

- External website links. Why some are more important than others and how to use writing to get high-ranking sites linking to your pages
- Creating content for your own site, other sites and in different formats to attract targeted traffic—for example dedicated article sections, article directories and eBooks

**Date:** Saturday 12 July 2008

**Time:** 9.30 am to 3.00 pm

**Venue:** National Library of Australia training room 3 & 4

**Cost:** \$150 (members)

\$195 (non-members)

Light lunch included

Maximum 20 participants

**Registration form on page 8**

**Information and bookings:**

margaret.millard@ozemail.com.au

## From the President



The exciting news this month is that Joe Massingham has finished conducting his focus groups and will have delivered his report by the time this newsletter is published.

This report will make very interesting reading and I am looking forward to sharing it with you at the June meeting.

I'd like to say a big Thank You and Welcome to our newsletter team who responded splendidly to our plea for help in our last newsletter. Please welcome Virginia Cooke and Rebecca Booth who will be taking over for the next issue.

On a less exciting and slightly sadder note, I have to announce that the committee has reluctantly decided to postpone EdEx to a date yet to be determined. We remain committed to EdEx but we felt that at this stage with a committee who are all very stretched in professional and personal lives, the planning just wasn't as advanced as we would have liked, and we felt that we wouldn't have been able to put on a show of the quality we have come to expect. We are looking for a new date but can't promise that it will be this year.

I will be proposing that we advertise through the newsletter for a separate coordinator who is not a member of the committee, but of course will work closely with the committee. One of our problems this time was I believe that we tried to do it using

the resources of the already stretched committee. I'd like to bring this up at the AGM in August, but of course I'd be more than prepared for someone to volunteer at any stage.

Speaking of the AGM, it is fast approaching. Normally we have the AGM instead of our regular July general meeting, but this year we are departing from this tradition. We will be taking advantage of the fact that we had paid a small deposit for EdEx at Old Parliament House on 2 August. Since we won't be having EdEx on that day, we have decided to use it instead for our AGM, and include a nice lunch with Kathy Golski as our guest speaker. The details are yet to be determined, but we anticipate starting the AGM at 11.00 am.

Speaking further of the AGM, it is time to start thinking about volunteering to be on the committee. All committee positions become vacant and while I hope current committee members will be willing to continue, the incumbents of some of the Executive positions (President, Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary) cannot be re-elected to those positions because they have already served two years, and under our constitution cannot serve a further consecutive term.

I particularly encourage newer members to go on the committee since it is a great way to get to know who's who in the society and thus an opportunity for some great networking. And of course we are always looking for fresh ideas.

See you on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

*Ted Briggs*

## IPed's first accreditation exam now on 18 October 2008

The cost of the exam will be \$490 (no GST) for members of societies of editors and \$650 for non-members and those who are not financial members at the close of registrations. Registrations for the exam will open in the first week of July and close on 18 September. All registrations must be accompanied by a non-refundable deposit of \$100, with the balance due by 3 October.

The fee is the minimum required to cover exam costs, based on a target number of 150 applicants. As some 200 editors have previously indicated their intention to sit for the first exam, the Accreditation Board is confident that the target will be met. There is no limit on the number of candidates for this exam: all candidates who register and pay the fee will be accommodated. If fewer than 150 apply, the Board will postpone the exam until early 2009.

As soon as registrations reach 150, the Board will confirm the 18 October date on the IPed website; if this target is not reached by 18 September, the Board will announce a new exam date for 2009 on the website and advise all candidates by email or telephone within a couple of days of that decision.

A revised sample exam, exam guidelines, an application form and a Q&A will be available on the IPed website by 1 July. The sample exam will be a very good indicator of what you can expect in October, and trialling it will help you decide whether you are ready for the exam. An editor with two to three years' full-time editing experience should be able to pass the exam. All societies will be organising pre-exam activities to help prepare candidates.

For further information, contact your Board delegates, Larissa Joseph and Chris Pirie, or visit the IPed website <<http://www.iped-editors.org/>>.

## Grammar's in style ... and the style is plain English



Plain English is the name given to a particular style of writing that has been adopted as the ideal style for business and government writing. It is clear, unambiguous, brief without being blunt, easy to grasp at first reading, and it is based on

sound English grammar principles.

I am not discussing all the principles of sound English grammar in this article—these will follow gradually. However, in essence they are these:

- recognising that English is a Subject-Verb-Object language and that word order is important for meaning; we don't have a full case system (like Latin, and some modern languages like Russian), so we need to put what we're talking about in Subject position in a sentence and what we're saying about the subject in the Predicate (Verb plus Object if any)
- knowing how to express tense (variations on simple past, present and future), mood (indicative, imperative and subjunctive) and voice (active and passive)
- structuring paragraphs so that they are easy for the reader to follow the progression of thought from beginning to end
- using words so that they express what you want them to express—writing in the 'code' that most people understand as standard English
- avoiding some of the more common writing errors such as shifts in time and person, lack of parallel structure in series and dot-point lists, lack of agreement between subject and verb or between pronouns and what precedes them, failing to punctuate for meaning
- ..... and more.

Plain English is a layer of style over the top of sound English grammar. It is the style preferred for business writing because business people are very busy people and do not have time to work out your grammar or confusing style. (I include government writing here because the people who read government publications or correspondence are frequently in a hurry and need to get the message quickly and clearly.)

What has this got to do with editors? Editors need to understand the principles of writing in plain English so that they can correct the writing if it is not clear, and so that they can explain their alterations to the

author. Yes, I believe it is part of our job as editors to help authors to write more clearly next time—we can't do that if we don't know a bit about the terminology to use when talking about it.

The main points to watch for when editing for plain English are:

- sentence length and readability
- voice: active or passive
- use of verbal nouns
- choice of words for the target audience and the topic
- use of jargon.

Let's look at each of those briefly.

### Sentence length and readability

Several short sentences are often easier to read and understand than one very long sentence.

Sentences become long by having more and more whole ideas added on, and on and on; or by having several side issues embedded in the main sentence.

Try to start new sentences when new ideas appear.

If a long sentence cannot be broken up, try listing similar items in bullet-point form.

Go for variety in sentence length—writing too many very short sentences is nearly as bad (for the reader) as writing too many very long sentences.

### Voice: active or passive

Active voice is when the doer of the action (or agent) is in Subject position in the sentence, and where the receiver of the action (or patient) is in Object position in the sentence. Example: *The boy (doer) kicked the ball (receiver).*

Passive voice is the exact opposite: the receiver of the action is in Subject position and the doer of the action is in Object position. Example: *The ball (receiver) was kicked by the boy (doer).*

Active voice is preferred in business writing because it is shorter than passive and it is clear who is responsible for what.

Passive voice can result in an 'agentless passive' where we don't know who is responsible for the action. Sometimes this can be a problem: *Your application has been rejected.* The reader is entitled to ask 'By whom?' if it is something that affects him or her personally. Sometimes it doesn't matter: *The low-lying parts of the town were flooded twice last year.* Obviously, water was the doer of the action—we don't need to say so.

As with sentence length, variety is good—mix active and passive, but aim for more active than passive in business writing. *(continued next page)*

## Use of verbal nouns

Verbal nouns are those nouns that are derived from verbs: *direction* from *direct*, *management* from *manage*, *discussion* from *discuss*, and so on. (They are also known as ‘nominalisations’.)

As a general rule, verbs are more dynamic than the nouns derived from them, so it is better, in business writing, to use the verbs. Example:

*The workers will discuss the project with whoever is responsible for coordinating it.*

is clearer, shorter and more ‘alive’ than

*The workers will hold discussions about the project with whoever has the responsibility for its coordination.*

## Choice of words for the target audience and the topic

The idea is to get a message through to the reader about the topic you are writing about. It is not to provide an opportunity for a Sunday afternoon ‘curl up with a good book’, or to drive the reader to the dictionary every minute or so.

Use the words you would use if you were speaking to the reader—conversational words.

Use plain words and phrases, not pompous ones. Examples: *total* is better than *aggregation*, *try* is better than *endeavour*, *help* or *make easy* is better than *facilitate*, *workable* is better than *viable*.

Avoid redundancies. Example: *We will cooperate* is better than *We will cooperate together*—‘together’ is implied in ‘cooperate’ anyway.

Avoid fillers (a kind of written throat-clearing).

Example: In this first sentence of a business letter

*I am writing to inform you that it would seem that there is a possibility that some staff have anticipated ...*

could be cut to

*Some staff have anticipated ...*

Avoid wordy phrases. Example: *If* is better than *in the event that or under circumstances in which*.

Avoid overdoing nouns in strings as adjectives.

Example:

*Inadequate staff performance review opportunities have led to ...*

is a mess. It would be better written as

*Inadequate opportunities to review performance of staff have led to ...*

Avoid overworking clichés and foreign words. Keep your writing fresh and in English. Example: *RSVP*—I have seen this used as a verb *Are you RSVPing this invitation?* Many people have no idea of the meaning of *RSVP*, or of Latin abbreviations like *eg*, *ie* and so on, so it’s better not to use them.

## Use of jargon

If you are editing technical writing intended for technical people to read, the jargon of that industry is perfectly acceptable. This only works within a very limited circle of readers. The golden rule about using jargon is: When in doubt, don’t. However, there are times when a technical term is the best term available—in that case, it needs to be explained, and there are several ways of doing this:

- explain it in a glossary
- explain it on the spot
- use a scenario to show how a difficult concept works in practice.

There is a lot more to plain English and to editing for plain English, but I hope the points set out here will alert you to some of the main problem areas to look out for in the next business or government document you edit.

© Elizabeth Manning Murphy, 2008

## Reference

Murphy, Elizabeth M, 1989 (various reprints up to 2008) *Effective writing: plain English at work*, Pitman, Melbourne (out of print but reprints available from the author) <emmurphy@ozemail.com.au>

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## Annual General Meeting

Old Parliament House

Saturday 2 August, 11:00 am, followed by lunch

## Guest speaker: Kathy Golski

Kathy Golski is a painter and a writer. Her first book, *Watched by Ancestors*, was published in 1998 by Hodder to critical acclaim. It was based on the diaries she kept during an extraordinary two years spent with her young family in the wilds of the New Guinea Highlands. Her second book, *My Two Husbands*, just published by Penguin, is a warm and moving account of the author’s life and love with two men and the children born to her two marriages.

Kathy has exhibited in Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, Brisbane and Warsaw, and her work is well represented in public, corporate and private collections. Kathy lived in Canberra for fifteen years, and now lives in her birth city, Sydney, with her anthropologist husband and various members of her extended family.

*My Two Husbands* will be having its Sydney launch the day after the event at Old Parliament House. The Canberra launch will take place immediately after our luncheon and members of the Canberra Society of Editors will be able to get their personally signed copy of the book at a special price.

## Thinking about words: pain at the pump



Fuel prices continue to rise and the debate rages about whether this is a bad thing or a good. Are you trying to use your car less because it costs so much to fill the tank? If so, you are also making a tiny gesture against the build-up of greenhouse gases. And as professional wordsmiths, do we stop to consider the language at the petrol pump?

Yes, that language could rage red-hot at times, especially when we find our petrol tank empty at the wrong point in the artificially induced 'weekly cycle' of price ups and downs but, for example, where did that word *fuel* come from? It goes back to the Latin word *focus*, meaning the 'fireplace, the hearth', the focus of the home. Medieval Latin had the term *focalia* for the stuff that you burnt in your hearth. This led to an Old French word *fouaille*, which sounds a bit more like 'fuel', and to the phrase *bouche et fouaille*, 'meat and fuel', covering the necessities of life. And yes, I know that *bouche* means 'mouth', but where do you think *le boucher*, the butcher, got his name? *Focus* can also mean the 'burning point' of a lens or concave mirror, where you can concentrate the sun's heat and start your fire. The physicist Kepler first used it in print in that sense in 1604.

*Petrol* is a shortened form of *petroleum*, a word that had its origins in the 14th century, derived from the Latin *petra*, rock, and *oleum*, oil. But our knowledge of petroleum is much more ancient, going back at least 5000 years. We think of it as coming up oilwells from the bowels of the earth, but there have always been regions where it seeps up to the surface of its own volition. One of these regions was the Euphrates, where the oils and waxes were used for medicine—and also for war. The Persians found that incendiary arrows wrapped in oil-soaked fibres were a great deterrent to the opposition during the siege of Athens in 480 BCE. Later both the Persian and the Arabs distilled crude oil to get greater flammability for warlike applications, and by the 12th century oil was used for lighting in parts of Europe.

After the discovery of the New World many more oil seeps were found, specifically in New York State and Pennsylvania. The Industrial Revolution was then gathering pace, and suddenly the demand for new power sources sky-rocketed. The first oilwell was drilled by a certain Mr Drake in Pennsylvania in 1859, and since then the world has never looked back—by the end of the 19th century oil had been

found in 14 states of the USA, in Europe and in Asia. Kerosene (the word *kerosene* comes from the Greek for wax) had formerly been distilled from coal to provide oil for lamps; it was logical to try oil instead of coal in the distillation plants, and that was the start of petrol refining—petrol was at first a by-product of kerosene production! Kerosene is still widely used for lighting and heating and to power jet engines.

Oil exploration never stops. However, it is estimated that by now 77 per cent of all the world's oil has been discovered, and 30 per cent has already been produced and consumed. As smaller and less accessible oilfields are worked, the cost begins to go up sharply—for example, recovering oil from 300 metres deep in the Gulf of Mexico costs 65 times as much as from dry land in the Middle East. Oil is a finite resource, and thanks to economic development worldwide we are using it up at an accelerating rate. Like it or not, it will run out, possibly within 40 to 50 years. Coal reserves are more abundant and it is possible to make petrol from coal, as the Germans did in both World Wars. At present the economics are not favourable, but if oil prices continue to rise they may become so.

The oil is pushed up the well by the pressure of petroleum gas, which also makes an efficient fuel in liquid form as LPG. That word *gas* was invented by a Dutch chemist Van Helmont around 1650, based on the Greek word for *chaos*. Knowing what we

know now about the frenzied movement of the molecules in a gas, it wasn't such a bad invention.

In most countries *diesel* is cheaper than petrol. The name comes from the inventor of the eponymous engine, Rudolph Diesel, a Franco-German thermal engineer who relentlessly pursued efficiency in the operation of

the internal combustion engine and by the 1890s had pretty well achieved it. The oil to fuel his engine is a mix of the lower fractions in oil distillation and so is cheaper to produce, besides going further because of that efficiency.

In France motor fuel is referred to in general as *carburant* ('hydrocarbon') but petrol is *essence*, having begun as *essence de pétrole* in the late 19th century. As a product of distillation, this terminology followed in the footsteps of the various floral essences that go to make up perfumes, and philosophically of 'essence' as the essential nature of something or someone. A petrol pump is a *pompe à essence*, and curiously that same word *pompe* also means 'pomp', particularly in connection with *pompes funèbres*, funeral services. (*cont. next page*)



Pumps for raising water have been around since the dawn of time. The word *pump* is related to the early Dutch *pompe*, and considering their skill at draining floodlands this seems logical. However, its first appearance in both Dutch and English was in the mid-15th century, for the devices used in ships for pumping out their bilges, and there seems to be doubt as to which country can claim prior use of the word. Its origin is supposed to be an echoic formation from the sound of the plunger striking the water. OK, *plop!*

We often call a petrol pump a bowser, a word used also for the tankers that refuel aircraft. I had thought that this name might come from the Old English

word *bowse*, meaning ‘to booze’, but no such luck. It seems that a petrol pump was patented in 1921 by a Mr S F Bowser of Fort Wayne, Indiana, and the name has stuck. If we face growing pain at the pump, we are unlikely ever to return to bliss at the bowser ... A sad moment at which to run out of gas ...

Peter Judge

Sources: The *Oxford English Dictionary* Second Edition on CD-ROM v.3.0. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2007 Ultimate Reference Suite. *Le trésor de la langue française* at <<http://atilf.atilf.fr/tlf.htm>>. Photo taken by the author at 10.00 am on Friday, 6 June—the height of the ‘weekly cycle’, on the eve of a long weekend.

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## 4th IPEd National Editors Conference: Adelaide 8–10 October 2009

If Peter Judge’s interesting and informative article in the May newsletter whetted your curiosity about the origins of the fascinating logo for next year’s National Conference, this article explains all, as well as whetting your appetite for the conference itself.

The search for a logo design for the 2009 IPEd National Editors Conference started in the months after the 2005 national conference in Victoria. There were about 15 editors from South Australia at the conference, who enjoyed the 2005 conference so much that they leapt on stage and agreed to take their turn and host the 2009 conference.

Once back in South Australia, the editors convened a conference committee and then said something very much along the lines of, ‘Oh my, what have we got ourselves into?’, though perhaps it was said a bit more strongly. They decided to start by finding a logo.

Greg Helbers of Loco Creative design studio took the conference theme ‘Getting the message across’ and proposed semaphore as a way of showing one, once efficient but no longer quite so, means of getting the message across. The whimsy of the tiny folk working so hard to convey their message appealed to us.

The initial design idea was provided to designer Stephanie Luke to complete. Through various iterations of colour, alignment, abbreviation, typeface, bolding and capitalisation Stephanie kept track of the torrent of feedback from the committee and came up with an elegant (and clever) design that fits in beautifully with the conference theme. Think about it; if a committee can find it difficult to reach a consensus, then a committee of editors must find it doubly hard.

But now, two years later, we are pleased and relieved to finally present the logo. *Voilà!*



getting the message across  
4th IPEd National Editors Conference  
8–10 October 2009 Adelaide

The logo may represent an old-fashioned technology but we believe the conference itself will showcase a myriad of ways in which editors and allied professionals have improved on the limitations of semaphore and even other more recent means of conveying and clarifying the message.

Here’s a link to help you discover what the little figures are spelling out: <http://inter.scoutnet.org/semaphore/>

We have some plans to extend our semaphore theme during the conference and will provide a cheat sheet for those of us who weren’t brownies or girl guides or scouts. We’ll keep this as a surprise for the event.

Additional details about the conference will be published in newsletters and via the websites below as they become available, so please stay tuned.

### Conference essentials

**Where:** Adelaide, South Australia

**When :** 8–10 October 2009

**Venue:** Adelaide Festival Centre

Further information: <[SAPresident@editors-sa.org.au](mailto:SAPresident@editors-sa.org.au)>

<http://www.editors-sa.org.au/conference09.html>

<http://www.iped-editors.org/content/conferences>

## Web writing workshop registration

Saturday 12 July 2008, 9.30 am to 3.00 pm  
National Library of Australia training room 3 & 4  
Lunch included. Only 20 places available.

Name: .....

Address: .....

Phone: (m) .....

(h) ..... (w) .....

Email: .....

Special diet needs: .....

No refunds for non-attendance unless we are notified  
48 hours before the course. Substitutions acceptable.

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## Payment details

Select one: CSE member \$150, or non-member \$195

We prefer payment by **EFT or direct deposit** to:

Financial institution: Community CPS Australia  
Account name: Canberra Society of Editors  
BSB: 805 022  
Account number: 0342 3503.

When paying by EFT or direct deposit, **email** all  
personal details at left and advise amount paid  
**by 9 July** to <margaret.millard@ozemail.com.au>.

Otherwise make **cheque or money order** to  
Canberra Society of Editors and **mail** it with this  
completed application **by Wednesday 9 July** to:

Course Registration, Canberra Society of Editors,  
PO Box 3222, Manuka ACT 2603

## July Newsletter

The copy deadline for the July newsletter is  
Friday 11 July. Please email your contributions to  
<tedbriggs@grapevine.com.au>.

## The Canberra Editor

is published by Canberra Society of Editors,  
PO Box 3222, Manuka ACT 2603.

Opinions and statements in signed articles are the  
responsibility of the author. This issue collated by  
Ted Briggs, typeset by Gil Garcon in *Microsoft  
Word*<sup>®</sup> (hence the oddities ☺) proofread by Sue  
Wales and the contributors.

© Canberra Society of Editors 2008. ISSN 1039-3358

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