

Creative Editing

Third
Edition



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Bowles**

**Diane L.
Borden**

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Edition

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Preface

THEY now bear titles such as database producer, technical director, informational designer, Internet strategist and Web technologist. They can earn between \$45,000 and \$110,000 a year, and the market for their talents gets stronger each year. They are the copy editors of the 21st century, and their jobs reflect the ubiquitous changes in communication technologies at the end of the millennium.

No matter what their titles, modern copy editors are at the very heart of any print or online media organization, supplying the lifeblood for healthy existence and serving as gatekeepers of news and entertainment for the public. More than at any previous time in history, senior editors recognize and appreciate the value of good copy editors. This praise makes even better an already excellent employment picture for copy editors, who are rewarded at many organizations with higher salaries than those of reporters or writers with comparable experience.

Journalists with the personal attributes and word and visual skills explained in this book will have no trouble finding stimulating and rewarding careers as copy editors. In addition, those who aspire to become managers will discover that the copy desk is a fertile training ground for learning the intricacies of the print or online production process and is a frequent path to management positions.

This third edition of *Creative Editing* recognizes and addresses the impact that technological, lifestyle and competitive changes have brought to traditional media industries, particularly as they affect the roles of copy editors. At the same time, the book emphasizes traditional and still highly valued editing skills: using correct grammar, punctuation, style and vocabulary; fact checking; writing headlines; handling photographs and informational graphics; using typography; and designing and laying out pages.

A special feature of *Creative Editing* is the extensive collection of in-book exercises, which allows students to test their understanding of the material in each chapter and to practice their editing skills. New exercises have been added to almost every chapter, and students may now download exercises from a Web site to practice electronic editing and layout. For instructors, an answer booklet is available upon adoption of the text.

Many other new features mark this third edition. New material about electronic editing, with a strong emphasis on the World Wide Web, is integrated throughout the book. The authors believe that the Internet and online publishing offer great potential as an expanding job market for copy editors. Thus, new material focuses on how to edit copy for Web sites; how to access Internet discussion groups of interest to communicators; how to use Internet search and fact-checking tools; and how to design and lay out Web pages.

Chapter 4 on editing stories is expanded to include editing copy for Web sites and copy from news services. Sections on how to edit stories based on public opinion surveys and how to handle copy laden with numbers have been updated and expanded. Chapter 5 on checking facts is completely revised. It teaches students how to find information in both printed and electronic versions of

standard reference works and how to use Internet search tools, discussion groups and commercial databases. The chapter includes extensive lists of reference materials and Web URLs useful for fact checking.

This edition also expands and updates material on journalism ethics, including new discussions about media credibility, media convergence, online ethics, and recent incidences of ethical lapses by journalists at large media organizations. Chapter 10 on editing pictures and infographics includes expanded information about digital photography and about matching the appropriate type of graphic to the information to be communicated. Many new examples of effective infographics also are included. Chapter 11 on layout and design has new sections on magazine and Web site layout and design, including many new and updated illustrations from professional and university publications.

Most chapters in the third edition include an end-of-chapter essay written by a professional journalist to help students understand the work of copy editors. A short biographical sketch and a small photo accompany each of these essays so students can see the career path of the professional. Of particular note in this edition is an essay by an online journalist at washingtonpost.com and an essay by two recent college graduates on the importance of internships.

As in prior editions, the organization of *Creative Editing* remains logical and progressive. Chapter 1 explores how media convergence is making the role of copy editors even more important now than in the past, explains the organization of a typical print-media organization and discusses career opportunities for copy editors.

Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 focus on the copy editor's tools: the proper use of grammar and punctuation; the importance of precision and consistent style when editing words, sentences and paragraphs; the importance of editing leads and making news judgments when editing stories, whether in print or online; and the need to check facts, including how to use both standard reference materials and electronic databases.

Chapter 6 offers a detailed treatment of legal concerns that affect editors—including libel, invasion of privacy and copyright infringement—and suggests ways that editors can help their publications avoid lawsuits. Chapter 7 examines ethical situations of specific concern to editors, including online ethics, and suggests ways to frame discussions that should prove useful in ethical decision-making. This chapter also offers a sampling of behavioral codes from professional journalism organizations, including the Society of Professional Journalists, as well as a section on how to edit with good taste and sensitivity.

Chapter 8 discusses typography, particularly type sizes, widths, styles, weights and families, and is a necessary precedent to Chapter 9, which focuses on the art of writing headlines. This chapter discusses the function and characteristics of headlines, increasingly important in the online environment, and offers rules for writing, counting, placing and styling headlines.

Chapters 10 and 11 launch a discussion of visual journalism, focusing particularly on editing pictures and infographics, including digital photographs, and on designing and laying out pages, both for print publications and on the Web. Chapter 11 also discusses pagination, personal computers and laser graphics.

Chapter 12 explores the growth of public relations as a career choice for students majoring in mass communication programs and suggests ways to create public relations materials such as fliers, brochures and newsletters.

An appendix provides an extensive list of frequently misused words.

Throughout the book, we have adhered to the most commonly used journalistic style and have sought to avoid sexism, racism, ageism, homophobia and other discriminatory language.

We would like to thank Rebekah Bromley for updating her chapter on creating fliers, brochures and newsletters. We also would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the professional journalists across the nation who helped supply materials and insights for this book. Special thanks go to our end-of-chapter essayists: Gina Acosta, Peter Bhatia, Sharon Bibb, Cole C. Campbell, J. Ford Huffman, Matthew Lee, Michele Medley, Lynne Perri and Amanda Traugher.

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Deadlines do not wait for inspiration.

—Charles M. Schulz, “Peanuts” creator

The Copy Editor’s Role in the Newsroom

CONVERGENCE. That was the buzzword in mass-media circles at the turn of the century. Convergence of technologies, convergence of job responsibilities, convergence of content. They burst onto the stage of journalistic debate at warp speed and with little regard for consequences. The name of the game was, and is, content.

What does convergence mean? And how will it affect the role of copy editors in the 21st century? To some, convergence means the merging of the technologies of communication—calling up the Internet on your cable television screen, or accessing a television news broadcast on your home computer. For others, convergence means mergers of media companies into mega-media companies—telephone companies that buy cable television companies that buy computer companies that buy newspaper companies that buy television networks, etc.

Convergence also may mean redefinition and marketplace relocation—newspapers becoming “information organizations,” partnering with other local media or organizations within the community to produce online city guides, such as Boston.com, Cox’s Access Atlanta and Knight-Ridder’s Real Cities sites.

Others see convergence as the intertwining of job responsibilities—reporters who conjure up photo illustrations for their stories, or copy editors who perform the tasks formerly performed by printers and typesetters. For others, convergence means the erasing, or at least blurring, of the lines between news and entertainment, between fact and opinion, between truth and fiction. Which is the “real” news program, ABC Nightly News with Peter Jennings or Hard Copy? Which is the “real” entertainment program, Entertainment Tonight or NBC News with Tom Brokaw? Which is truth and which is fiction, Boston Globe columns by Mike Barnicle or Tom Berendt’s novel, *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*?

At the 1997 Catto Conference on Journalism and Society, set in the breathtaking mountain landscape of Aspen, Colo., noted journalist and author Robert MacNeil explored these issues. He said the news media are treading on dangerous ground if they remain isolated from these trends.

“The compartments between ours and other segments of the media are not colorfast,” he said. “Our products are tossed in the same frenzied laundromat of competition for the public’s attention and dollar, and the fabrics bleed into one another. The ravishing colors of entertainment media bleed into the necessary black, white, and grey of journalism ... in print and video and on the Internet.

“The range of media activities now resemble the electromagnetic spectrum. All human activities, from a Mozart opera to pornography, to war on Saddam Hussein, to a learned article in a scientific journal ... are reducible to digital bits and bytes, evermore tightly compressed, evermore quickly flashed ... around the globe in the blink of any eye....”

MacNeil was talking about convergence, especially in media content. For journalists, and particularly for copy editors, at the beginning of a new millennium, the production of content will be, as it always has been, an essential

How we got here

The importance of good copy editing

The duties of a copy editor

The characteristics of a good copy editor

The copy desk in a modern newsroom

The editing process

A modern editor looks to the future

ingredient in any media company's success. Companies that supply content to those who control the technological means to transmit it will benefit most in the new age, according to 52 percent of senior industry executives polled at a 1998 Global Convergence Summit presented by Business Week magazine and Price-Waterhouse-Coopers accounting firm. Newspapers, magazines, broadcast stations, public relations firms, advertising agencies and World Wide Web sites will be competing for bright, energetic, talented people who understand this brave new world of content convergence.

The often-unspoken theme that underlies these discussions is the need for good editing and for good editors. Copy editors in the 21st century will be less likely than their 20th century counterparts to perform media-specific tasks or to think in narrowly defined media boxes. They will perform all the tasks discussed in this book—copy editing, headline writing, layout and design, etc.—and they will perform them in a variety of media forms. Editors will prepare a story for a print publication, for example, then later in their workday, add video and audio for a broadcast version or an online version. At places like MSNBC (a media organization put together by Bill Gates' Microsoft Corp. and the National Broadcasting Co.), editors already perform this multitasking and find it's an exciting new world.

How we got here

It became commonplace in the mid-1990s for reporters and editors of the print media to go online—to retrieve information from government documents, to gather information from online discussion groups and chat rooms, and to publish information in many formats, including electronically, for their readers. According to the Poynter Institute, a journalism education facility in St. Petersburg, Fla., 702 U.S. daily newspapers offered Web sites in 1997, more than triple the number only a couple of years earlier. In addition, thousands of magazines, newsletters, newswires and television and radio transcript services had created online products (see Figure 1-1).

The immediacy and the relatively easy access to electronic information has lured millions of people to the Internet, but for journalists and copy editors, in particular, the beauty of the new resources may be a beast as well. The media marketplace has become increasingly competitive, and many forms of traditional mass media are struggling to maintain their market share. Both newspapers and network news programs have shown declines in the last two decades. Total daily newspaper circulation had declined to 56.7 million in 1997, and only 48 percent of those surveyed in a 1995 Times Mirror Center poll had watched a network news program the night before, down from 60 percent in 1993. More than 150 dailies have folded in the last 30 years, as have countless magazines and newsletters.

Many new print media outlets have been created, of course, as have a plethora of online news and information services. But for print media journalists, the challenge to relate to readers in new and exciting ways is stronger than ever (see Figure 1-2). Traditional concerns about core journalism values such as accuracy and balance also have come under renewed scrutiny as more and more journalists use the emerging online technologies to gather and analyze news and information (see Chapter 7 on ethics).

Even with the headlong rush into the new technologies, most news publications in the new millennium probably will not look much different from those of today. They simply will be better organized, concentrate more on their primary geographic communities, use more color and attempt to squeeze more information into less space.