

The book cover features a complex collage of images. On the left, there's a vertical strip with a grid of small, colorful squares (blue, orange, green, yellow) overlaid on a background of a spiral-bound notebook and a magnifying glass. The right side of the cover is a dark, textured area with a faint, large-scale grid pattern. The authors' names are printed in white at the top right, and the title is in white and red in the center. The edition information is printed vertically on the bottom right.

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Second Edition

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To Ray Simon, Tony Vella and Richard Cole—
mentors, friends and models of excellence.

A Preface for Students

As you open this book for the first time, you may already know as much about editing as you will learn in the pages to follow. You just don't *know* you know it. But you've been practicing real-life editing skills since childhood: distinguishing fact from opinion, figuring out who's reliable and who's not, trying to clear up confusion and—most of the time, anyway—telling the truth.

When you began to write, you developed a whole new set of editing skills. Now precision mattered more because you had to say exactly what you meant; you might not be around to clarify things if someone misunderstood. Your written words also *represented* you. If a school essay or a personal letter was marred by misspellings, carelessness, illogical thinking and stains from your lunch, chances are you dropped a notch in the eyes of your reader. Being careful paid off.

Professional news editing is more sophisticated than those kinds of editing, but it's not really very different. It's still about figuring out what the facts are and who can be trusted. It's still about clarity, credibility and making life easier for your audience. When you begin to think about editing visually—designing pages, graphics and Web sites—you'll even find that it's still, in a sense, about not getting mustard all over everything. Most of all, professional editing is still about truth-telling and being careful.

What does change when you begin to study editing and develop an editor's attitude is that your skills expand and your standards rise. The kinds of decisions that were once vague and instinctive take on new shades and nuances. The little things that once didn't seem to matter much—grammar, the first sentence, who said what—begin to look much more important. The big issues become clearer as well. Your judgments about what you read, see and hear are no longer just gut reactions; they are based on established values and principles. And the audience now is not just a teacher or your classmates. It's the public—hundreds or thousands or millions of people you don't know. And they're counting on you.

This book will help you develop the skills and concepts you need to edit news and information across the media and in many different kinds of newsrooms. If you're a regular reader of newspapers or magazines, a TV news watcher, a fan of radio or a Web denizen, you may be under the impression that professionals in one field don't need to pay much attention to the others. Or if your interest is in a particular beat—sports, say, or entertainment—you may believe that studying different kinds of news isn't going to reap many benefits. We hope you'll put aside that idea for a few chapters. A well-defined interest or career goal can be a great motivator, but too narrow a focus at the start of your journey can be an obstacle, for three reasons.

- First, you might surprise yourself and find something you like better. You'll hear from a young editor in Chapter 1 who set out to be a reporter and fell in love with editing along the way. She had a goal, but she kept her options open.
- Second, basic editing skills are similar in every medium and every field. You'll need sound news judgment whether you're editing a newspaper, anchoring a sportscast or running your own Web site. You'll need to understand journalistic ethics whether you're publishing a public relations newsletter, reviewing concerts or directing political coverage for a news magazine. And you'll need a command of grammar and style whenever you put your hands on a computer keyboard or pick up a microphone. More editors will be telling you about the importance of the basics in the early chapters. But as this book unfolds, you'll also find plenty of guidance on more specialized editing topics and styles.
- Third, the best and best-paid modern editors are not specialists. They usually have an area of expertise, but they know their way around outside its confines, and they do more than one thing well. The old walls that separated print, broadcast and online journalism are falling in a hurry. When the dust clears, the people in charge will be editors who can adapt their skills and their thinking to a multimedia world.

That's not to say that editors must do everything or that they all do the same thing. Some editors—and their broadcast colleagues, producers and news directors—make decisions about coverage, direct reporters and photographers, and set policy. Some concentrate on the visual dimension of the news by working with page and Web design, photos and graphics. Others, known as copy editors, devote most of their time to improving stories and writing headlines. Copy editing skills are the foundation for other kinds of editing, and most graduates who enter the field begin as copy editors, so you'll find that most of the emphasis in the early chapters of this book is on copy editing.

But while editors perform a variety of tasks and hold a sometimes confusing range of titles, the job comes down to this: Editors take charge when news breaks. They manage information and make sure stories are told well. They plan and present the news. They think about the big picture and, when the time comes, they bring that picture into sharp focus.

Editors don't often get much attention, probably because the title has so many meanings and the people who hold it usually work behind the scenes. It's not a job for those journalists who need to be on camera or see their bylines on the front page every day. But for the rest of us, editing jobs are something of a hidden treasure. Editors don't get stuck on a beat or get kinks in their necks from working the phones. They get to move around the newsroom and do different things—advising a reporter here, tinkering with a story there, writing headlines, planning a page. Good editors can slide into almost any seat in the newsroom and find their way around in a few hours. That's because they're driving the bus.

Realistically, though, not everyone interested in a media career wants to be an editor. Many reporters are hooked on the thrill of the chase or the pleasures of

writing. The newsroom is too claustrophobic; they need to get out on the street, joust with the mayor or the coach or just talk to a stranger who might turn a good quote. And public relations and advertising students, future anchormen and women, students from other majors who are picking up a stray elective—what’s in this book for you?

The answer is that editing is not just for editors. By studying the editing process, you will learn a great deal about how information is gathered, packaged and exchanged in a society where the media play a crucial role. You will develop new critical-thinking skills as you observe how editors evaluate sources and information. You will see how values and ethical standards work in real life, under deadline pressure. Finally, you will find that by developing an editor’s perspective and attention to detail, you’ll become a much better writer.

All of you edit. Some of you are editors, or will be soon. You share a mission: to tell stories that matter in a complicated and often confusing world. The people to whom you tell those stories won’t always agree with you. Sometimes you’ll have to earn their trust.

But they’re counting on you.

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The second edition relies as well on the invaluable criticism and insights of many reviewers. Lee Bolinger of Coastal Carolina University, Catherine Cassara of Bowling Green State University, James W. Fickess of Arizona State University, Judi Hetrick of Miami University, Alan Kirkpatrick of the University of Col-

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Cecilia Friend

Donald Challenger

Katherine C. McAdams

A Teacher's Preface to the Second Edition

The first edition of “Contemporary Editing” was completed just five years ago. But that was also another century. As journalists and citizens, we now live in a different world.

Media technology has continued to evolve at a dizzying pace, and with it the culture of the newsroom. In 1999, the Web was still an enigma to many journalism teachers and professionals, bedazzling some and giving others vertigo. Interactive formats were still widely regarded as little more than plugged-in letters to the editor. Convergence and Weblogs existed only at the margins and in rudimentary forms. The protean nature of it all seemed simultaneously to threaten time-honored editing standards and to offer a liberating vision of how news might be gathered and produced.

Perhaps it still does, on both counts. But the overheated rhetoric of the late '90s has given way to a more sober assessment of the Web as a daily tool—along with a growing realization that it really is going to redefine what journalists do before all is said and done.

Much of the digital landscape is still being charted, but other recent lessons for editors may seem far too familiar. The first edition of this book pointed to such ethical transgressions as Stephen Glass' magazine fabrications in marking 1998 as “one of the darkest” years in the history of journalism. If only we'd known. Elsewhere in that edition, we quoted an idealistic student journalist from the University of Maryland. We applauded his vision and suggested that the future of journalism was in good hands with young Jayson Blair and others like him.

And, of course, we can only glance back at 1999 across the abyss of Sept. 11, 2001. It may not be, as the cliché goes, that “everything changed” on that sunny Tuesday morning. But the events of the day and their aftermath—from the war on terrorism to the more conventional military conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, from embedded journalism to government secrecy and larger issues of balance and objectivity—challenge editors to think anew about the culture of news and their place in it.

All these developments and many others—the 2000 election night debacle, the growth of media conglomerates, the expansion of community news and the evolution of online libel law among them—have necessitated not just an updated “Contemporary Editing” but a thorough revision. Each chapter has been rewritten to consider the impact of recent stories, technology and newsroom developments on editors' work. Editing for the Web and convergent newsrooms, while

still the subject of the final chapter, also has been incorporated into other chapters of the book. Coverage of editing for television and radio has been greatly expanded as well, particularly in the early chapters.

This edition of “Contemporary Editing” also benefits from generous suggestions by dozens of reviewers, colleagues and students who have helped make it a better text for classroom use. From the first page, we have placed more emphasis on the experiences of working editors, on the drama and diversity of life in the newsroom, on coaching and working with writers, and on career opportunities in editing. Yet we also have shortened the book substantially by eliminating redundancies, trimming sections on theory and history, and abandoning chatty asides on minor issues. It is a tighter, smarter, leaner book.

Some things, however, have not changed. There are few absolutes in journalism, but the fundamental principles that have shaped the best news editing for generations are as relevant as ever in the 21st century. And as digital technology and new media proliferate, it is especially important that young editors be deeply grounded in those principles. “Contemporary Editing” repeatedly emphasizes this continuity between tradition and innovation through key themes:

- **Accuracy and truth-telling are imperative.** Pure objectivity may be an unreachable ideal, but a commitment to facts, fairness and completeness is not. Good editors settle for nothing less.
- **All editing has an ethical dimension.** The popular notion that ethical thinking comes into play only on controversial stories is a dangerous myth. Ethics is about doing the small things well and consistently, from basic copy editing and writing headlines to cropping photos and posting breaking stories on the Web.
- **Grammar and style matter deeply.** They are not specific to one medium; neither do they belong to outdated tradition. When editors serve a large, public audience, they must speak in a public voice—a language of clarity and inclusion.
- **Basic editing skills cross media boundaries.** Newspapers, magazines, broadcast, the Web and public relations may have different aims and employ somewhat different styles. But all rely on a core of common editing principles and values.
- **News is a conversation, not a monologue.** Good editors have always encouraged readers and viewers to participate in newsgathering and commentary. The interactive possibilities of online media, however, raise the stakes. As “citizen journalists” become partners, editors must make the news culture more inclusive by serving as guides as well as gatekeepers.
- **Editors don’t work in isolation.** They make decisions based on news values and news judgment—time-honored but flexible standards about what is important and appealing to the audience. And they learn that discussion with other journalists and with the audience is crucial to making good decisions.
- **Editing is a way of thinking.** It requires specific mechanical skills, but it is much more than those skills. Good editors balance logic with creativity, curiosity with caution, and an ability to listen with a strong sense of responsibility.

- **Editing is not just for editors.** Walls are falling, figuratively and literally, across the media landscape. Any career in journalism, communication or design requires editing expertise, technological skills and critical-thinking abilities unimaginable just a few years ago. A course in editing is one of the best places to develop that balance of talents.

But there's something more, beyond the skills, habits and ideas that we all seek to communicate to our editing students: It's a sense of perspective. Anyone who has worked as an editor knows that the learning curve never flattens out. There's always something new and uncertain that requires one's attention: a different writer with different problems, the latest digital innovation, a story that defies the familiar categories. Something strange always awaits because editors are generalists. They rush in where others fear to tread, learning as they go.

That is a comfortable truism for us as teachers, but for students it may have another, more unnerving meaning: The editor's universe is infinite. There's no way to really get a handle on *all* this stuff. And they're absolutely right. No one truly masters editing in a career, much less in a semester.

Perhaps our most difficult task as mentors is to dispel the sense of dread that sometimes comes with all that uncertainty, and to communicate instead the pleasure and excitement it can inspire. Editing can be demanding and stressful, but it can also be exhilarating. Good editors grow constantly, with every story and every deadline. They're in a job where they can explore and expand their horizons almost by the minute. And as the Web, convergence and multiplatform publishing mature, the next generation of editors will have the opportunity to paint on an even broader canvas. We hope that "Contemporary Editing" will help you give your students both the tools and the perspective to paint boldly.

How This Book Is Organized

"Contemporary Editing" consists of 16 chapters in three sections.

- The first six chapters are devoted to basic skills and ideas. They introduce the student editor to the newsroom, explain different editing jobs and careers, and teach the fundamentals of copy editing, grammar, AP style and headline writing.
- Chapters 7 through 12 address more specialized editing tasks and topics: local, community and wire news, polling, features and working with writers. Chapter 12 is devoted to ethical and legal issues, topics that receive further treatment throughout the text. Instructors may wish to use all these chapters or choose among them, according to the needs of the course.
- Chapters 13 through 16 focus on the visual and multimedia aspects of editing: photos, graphics, design, the Web and convergence. These chapters have been fully updated to reflect recent Web trends, design developments and new technology.

“Contemporary Editing” is not, however, a technical manual. Widely used applications, tools and ideas such as Adobe PhotoShop, Macromedia Flash, RSS feeds, hypertext, search engines and portals, multiplatform publishing, Weblogs and dayparting are briefly explained where appropriate. But this book does not aim to provide training in the use of specific software or computer systems. Instead, the focus is on showing how different kinds of tools and applications affect editing, ethics, news judgment, design and the news culture.

For a more detailed summary of each chapter, please see the complete Table of Contents.

Other Features

Appearing with each chapter is an “Insight” feature, a profile of a working journalist or scholar in the field covered by that chapter. Each “Insight” allows a distinguished professional to communicate ideas and suggestions directly to students, as well as to impart some of the excitement of an editing career.

Chapters are also accompanied by “Editor’s Bookshelf” sections that suggest books, articles and online reading for further information. Numerous additional boxes and sidebars in each chapter provide practical tips, checklists and information on specialized topics.

Each chapter of the text begins with a brief “This Chapter at a Glance” overview and ends with a synopsis of key points titled “A Look Back at This Chapter.” Taken together, these summaries provide a quick review of each chapter for students and instructors.

Appendices at the back of the book provide a glossary, a list of frequently misused words, a summary of key grammar and punctuation rules, sample page dummies and guidance on counting headlines and sizing photos manually. Terms that appear in bold in the text are defined in the glossary.

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Image and reality: Editing images requires technical skills, respect for photographers' work, and an understanding of how reality is distorted when pictures are manipulated. 325

Selecting photos: Photos are chosen on the basis of their technical quality, their news value and their energy and drama. 326

Other ethical and legal issues: Images are more disturbing than words, and cameras are more intrusive than notebooks. That can mean tough calls for editors. 335

Cropping and sizing photos: These technical skills help editors emphasize the most important content of the photo and fit it into an effective page layout. 340

Writing cutlines: A few guidelines help keep these often-neglected photo explanations clear, crisp and energetic. 343

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Showing the Story: Editing Information Graphics 348

The value of showing the story: Information graphics combine explanatory images and text to convey complex data quickly and efficiently. 348