

## Manitoba Editors' Association

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*"The flux of language and our imperfect memories bid us to draw on a small library of language reference guides as we work."*

—Arthur Plotnik

## Newsletter Committee

Sarah Broadfoot  
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Dora Dueck  
Marjorie Poor  
Carrie Walker-Jones

We're on the web!

[www.manitobaeditors.ca](http://www.manitobaeditors.ca)



## Rants & Raves

by M. d'Almeida

In a world where there is a lot to rant about, raves, sometimes, are a little hard to come by. After racking my brain looking for something to rave about in editing, I realized that my rave was right in front of me: the MEA. No, this isn't meant to be a membership drive, but the truth is, I'm impressed with the MEA.

I'm not sure, but I would venture that editors are a pretty small group in Manitoba. Out of this, I believe, is born the attribute of *inclusiveness* that I think best describes the MEA.

I'm fairly new to this association and didn't know anyone when I joined. But, when I showed up at my first MEA event, I was immediately welcomed and encouraged to participate. Next thing I knew, I was on a committee. We joke that the only qualifications required to be on a committee are a heartbeat and a Costco membership. But what I think really underlies all of this is a willingness to welcome people and listen to what they have to say. Bravo MEA. Costco memberships, \$55.

## Editors' Aisle

Dora Dueck reviews Arthur Plotnik's classic *The Elements of Editing*

*The Elements of Editing: A Modern Guide for Editors and Journalists.* Arthur Plotnik. Macmillan Pub. Co., 1982.

Recently (just to keep up my licence!), I re-read Arthur Plotnik's *The Elements of Editing: A Modern Guide for Editors and Journalists*. It was published in 1982, so I need to begin this review with the obvious: many of the book's references, especially concerning technology, are completely outdated.

Apart from what has to be ignored, however, are sections well worth their time. These are the chapters that articulate a philosophy of editing, or, better said, describe who an editor is, or might at least strive to become.

Plotnik, editor of the magazine *American Libraries* when he wrote this book, makes the role sound complex, and difficult, but lofty too, and for those of us in the trenches (needing to keep up our licences), his words remind us what a fine task we're about, notwithstanding generally low wages and our shared "neurotic trait called compulsiveness."

But there's a good and a bad compulsiveness, Plotnik explains: the bad is "editor-related" (personal stylistic hobby horses, or the obsessive need to change something whether it needs changing or not); the good is "reader-oriented" (such as rewriting any headline that doesn't motivate the reader, or conducting multiple proofreadings).

*"To know who uses which words when is the proper study of editors."*

Plotnik is especially good on the "uneasy alliance" between editor and writer. Writers know their subject; editors know their audience, he says, and the editor's "only permanent alliance is with the audience."

In spite of the language of warfare (he calls copy editing "hand to hand combat"), Plotnik is no author basher and gives no comfort to editors who don't play fair.

—Dora Dueck

## Upcoming events

- February 24 — Newspaper Editing Panel
- March — Tour of Prolific Printing and It's up to you! Games Night? Design & the Publishing Process? Let us know.
- April — Stylistic Editing, Part IV
- May — Fact Checking
- June — Year-end Windup



Manitoba Editors' Association

# Track Changes

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## Inside this issue:

Punctuation with punch	2
Copy editing	2
MEA Member profiles	3
For My Eyes Only	3
Rants & Raves	4
Upcoming events	4
Editors' Aisle	4

## A headliner is born

### MEA launches biannual newsletter

It's been a gleam in more than one MEA president's eye, and now it's finally here – the Manitoba Editors' Association has its very own newsletter.

The plan is to start off modestly, with a four-page publication twice a year – in February, to keep members in touch in the dead of winter, and in September, just after the Annual General Meeting. Once more members get involved as designers, contributors, and editors, *Track Changes* will expand in size and/or be produced more frequently.

Don't be surprised if the look of the newsletter changes throughout its growing period. Design decisions have been made more for expediency than



for aesthetics at this point, and refinement is definitely in order. Thank goodness for computer programs that allow even the most design-challenged editors to create a presentable product. Coming out only twice a year, this will be more letter than news, but *Track Changes* will offer more in-depth coverage of events than is available on the website, as well as regular columns of book reviews, member profiles, rants and/or raves (this issue kicks things off with a rave), editing tips, websites of interest, and whatever

else members express an interest in reading.

So sit back and enjoy your first issue of *Track Changes* – at least it will be a quick read, which is always welcome during these busy days. Find both the practical and the pleasurable in the words that follow.

Try not to find too many typos (we are volunteers, after all), but feel free to offer ideas for content and design, as well as more general feedback and first impressions. A Letters to the Editor section is a distinct possibility in future issues, but that depends on actually receiving some letters. We would also welcome articles about any interesting projects on which you are working.

Finally, a word of thanks to the hardworking newsletter committee, who quickly produced quality work.

*"It's not enough to create magic. You have to create a price for magic, too. You have to create rules."*  
—Eric A. Burns,  
Gossamer Commons

## Special points of interest:

- Our Founders
- Books: Editors' Aisle
- Websites
- Workshops Past & Future

## Message from the Acting President

Welcome to the first issue of *Track Changes*!

Change is the theme of the Manitoba Editors' Association this year, as you know from the recent changes in the Executive Committee of MEA.

As you heard in an email message late last year, our President, Rick Wood, regrettably resigned from both the Executive and the Events Committees. Rick is so good at so

many things that he has left a number of holes that the remaining committee members are valiantly trying to fill.

We are counting on your patience, support, and enthusiastic participation in this period of transition. There is room for a variety of contributions, so if you want to volunteer, please email us at <meaworkshops@gmail.com>.

Marjorie Poor



## Punctuation with punch

by Marjorie Poor

As anyone who has read Lynne Truss's *Eats, Shoots and Leaves* knows, punctuation brings out the passion and the sense of fun in people.

On November 25, just over 20 die-hard language lovers spent a full Saturday examining the power of punctuation at the University of Winnipeg. English

Janis Pregnall presented every possible way one could want to use (and even some ways one would not want to use) apostrophes, hyphens, semicolons, commas, ellipses, colons, dashes, brackets, and quotation marks.

An opening anecdote about a sign on

campus woke people up: A comma was strategically added to change "Women don't lie about rape" to "Women, don't lie about rape."

Pregnall was prepared for stylistic differences among editors and was very open to contributions. One book editor with a lot of publishing experience explained the mystery of the North

American shift to placing commas and periods inside quotation marks at all times: typesetters were afraid of losing the tiny marks.

Pregnall addressed the stickier questions that had been collected for her ahead of time, such as when to break the convention about square

brackets within parentheses.

Any skepticism about the fun of filling a day with punctuation conventions was dispelled – whether a refresher or an eye-opener, this workshop proved valuable to all participants.



Presenter Janis Pregnall and event organizer Rick Wood

**Most useful advice regarding hyphens: Consult a reliable dictionary.**

## Copy editing for the conscientious

by Jillian Brown

The classroom was packed with nearly 30 eager editors and writers for the Manitoba Editors' Association's first workshop of the 2006–07 season. Copy Editing with Duncan McMonagle.

In the half-day workshop, McMonagle, former editor and reporter for *The Globe and Mail* and *Winnipeg Free Press*, and current journalism instructor at Red River College, led participants in a discussion about the importance of copy with consistent style and how to achieve that consistent style through the use of stylebooks.

Handouts were plentiful as McMonagle exercised participants' editing and proofreading skills with examples of marred copy from newspapers, magazines, and press releases.



Duncan McMonagle describes some common "screw ups"

Other topics touched upon included proofreading marks, the six "subconscious" steps of editing, and headline and deck writing.

Quick games of "Spot the Screw Up" paced the seminar and kept participants on their seats, competing to be the first to catch the copy error (which, with all the keen eyes and minds, always turned into more than one).

### Add to your favourites

Check out these websites the next time you have a spare moment or two:

- [www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/CMS\\_FAQ/qatopics.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/CMS_FAQ/qatopics.html)
- [www.cbc.ca/news/indepth/words](http://www.cbc.ca/news/indepth/words)
- [www.columbia.edu/cu/cup/cgos2006/basic.html](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/cup/cgos2006/basic.html)



## MEA Member Profiles: Then and Now

Membership Chair Carrie Walker-Jones speaks with founding members

In March of 1999, a diverse group of editors gathered at the Heaven Art and Book Cafe on Corydon to talk about developing a professional organization. They were keen to discuss issues they faced as editors. They also wanted opportunities to participate locally in ongoing professional development. Initially, there was some discussion about whether this group would affiliate with the Editors' Association of Canada, but eventually they decided against it. And so the Manitoba Editors' Association came to be.

Current MEA members Heidi Harms, Susan Rempel Letkemann, and Doug Whiteway were all at that meeting eight years ago. Although the cafe they met in is now gone, the MEA is still thriving.

Heidi Harms, Associate Editor of *Prairie Fire* magazine, thinks that the reason the group remains so viable is that it continues to be a grassroots organization. "From the beginning, the MEA has drawn on the expertise of its own members," Heidi says. "I remember when Carol Dahlstrom instructed a small group how to track changes during online editing – a new technological tool in those days."

Susan Rempel Letkemann, a Publications Editor for Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, agrees that volunteerism has kept the organization strong. "There has been a good rotation of people on the committees," Susan says. "Different people participating in the workshops have provided a lot of variety that draws on the different areas of editing."

Doug Whiteway is the Editor at *The Beaver* and a published author. He appreciates how the professional development workshops have served as refresher courses and helped him learn how to work better with art directors and designers. Having belonged to both professional editing and writing groups, he jokes about how well organized editors are in comparison – and often wonders where he really belongs.



Susan Rempel Letkemann, Heidi Harms, and Doug Whiteway still happy and active members

They all agree that even if you don't actively participate in workshops, it's still important to support the organization through membership. "Editing is quite invisible – unless it's not done," Susan says. "Having an organization gives the profession prominence."

One hope they share for the future of the organization is that they'd like to see an advisory program take shape. Although there are now professional editing courses offered at some of the universities and colleges, most of them are geared towards journalism. Doug, who comes from a journalism background, says the MEA doesn't tend to draw newspaper editors. Instead it attracts freelancers from other kinds of editing (including book publishing and curriculum development, journals and newsletters, academic and literary editing, etc.). The group sees the benefit of matching emerging editors with more experienced editors with specific expertise and mentoring skills.

When asked why they've remained with the MEA for all these years, Heidi says, "I like the sense of community and the sense of connection that we share."

## For My Eyes Only: Protecting your privacy

Administrator Sarah Broadfoot explains new MEA policy

As part of my role as MEA Administrator, I act as the association's privacy officer. I must ensure that personal information collected from our members is used solely to carry out MEA business. Not to solicit your participation in my uncle's new pyramid scheme, or to pass on any "forward this or you'll die" emails. And

definitely not to set up an online dating profile ... I promise.

I enter the information provided on all membership applications into a database and then use it to distribute MEA-related information. Our policy is to communicate with lapsed members via email for six months after the end of each

membership year. Paid members always receive news first, however, and after the six-month waiting period, they alone receive MEA communication.

Our full privacy policy will soon be available on our website. If you have any questions, email <meaworkshops@gmail.com>.