

Thoughts on Editing Publications

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FOR AS LONG as I have been editing publications, I have always observed that I do more editing on roughly the first half of the manuscript and often times considerably less on the second half.

For quite some time I thought that perhaps fatigue was a factor; particularly on the stretch models which can require eight hours just to read through the first time.

So for a number of years I divided some of the manuscripts with varying lengths and edited the aft end first. Then I tried some variables by starting off with editing the manuscripts first thing in the morning, mid-morning, and late morning. I did the same thing in the afternoons, including the last of the afternoon. I have even taken long lunch hours and when the restaurant isn't crowded, I find some quiet booth to see what happened. Still, the first half got it the hardest.

With that in mind, I have put publications away and then edited them a week or so later. I noticed I picked up things I overlooked in the previous readings, but still no change in the editing pattern.

Trisected

I have even divided manuscripts into thirds and used the same variables as mentioned. Again, no change. This experimentation gives me cause to think authors really get into the swing of things around the halfway point and then really plow ahead. Really, I think this usually fits all of us. Say like writing a letter. I may stare and languish at the keyboard for some time, but when I finally get that first paragraph written, then sometimes

the dam breaks and I find my fingers trying to keep up with a flood of thoughts. That is when I type as if I were trying to type the dictionary in 10 minutes because I want to get my thoughts on paper before they get away. The appearance of the typed page is dreadful, but as long as it contains what I want, then I can refine the crude product into something that hopefully would be of some value.

When time permits, I prefer to keep a manuscript for three weeks under normal circumstances. I generally read the manuscript two or three times and then put it aside. I also do this with my own writing when possible. Whether we're producing a story or a publication, I find that concentrating on them for a while and then putting them aside produces a better product. As all of us know too well, rushing out a publication can certainly be the genesis of a lot of errors.

Editing for Editing's Sake

I must mention that I don't edit just to edit because I regard the publication as the work of the author and I feel a responsibility to keep it something of his own hand rather than what I could have written or rewritten. Otherwise I edit quite severely on long sentences, improper punctuation, disagreements between nouns and verbs, and the various other do's and don'ts of our language

We have all discussed readability so much that I call Herman Melville to mind. I have been able to get only halfway through his *Moby Dick* because some sentences are a page or more long. He liberally embellished his works with punctuation, and I get the darndest desire to get a blue pencil and get to work. So I doubt I'll ever read the entire book for it is like trying to shovel snow out of the driveway when the wind is blowing. I can read it for so long and then I must quit. I am awfully glad I wasn't around to edit his copy.

The Difference Again

Regarding what I mentioned about light and heavy editing, there are variations in one's writing ability and I emphatically do not list this as a criticism against competent men who excel in their fields. I know what a piezometer is and I am also familiar

with diethylstilbestrol, but heaven help mankind if I were left to do something with them. In cases where the manuscript is not well written or organized, I do much more editing and reorganization and I find I do not have to work more or less on the first or second half or the middle.

As noted, I don't edit just to edit, but there are some phrases or terms I really go after and I am sure there's not one of us that doesn't have his own little bag of no no's. Advertisements of any type that say "scientifically" this or that really bug me, and etc. is certain to fire a round over Elvin Powell's bow.

I try to achieve some variety in sentence length and since we are dealing with an art, there are some sentences that can be logically long. My view is if the sentence flows along smoothly, then let it be. Otherwise, I split long sentences apart and I always get pretty rough on sentences that acquire the length of a paragraph. I find a lot of sentences begin with it, and they too get eliminated if at all possible.

The grammar rules I have read indicate a conjunction is set off with commas and is used to connect two coordinate clauses. I think that's subject to interpretation now with what we are calling modern English. There are times I let a sentence beginning with a conjunction, such as however, go through. George Diesel invented the diesel engine and for years Diesel was always spelled with an upper case D. Now as a sign of the time and change, Mr. Diesel just gets a lower case now.

I think too many words are hyphenated and I see a lot of semicolons that need yanking out.

Here are a few items I go after and I am sure everyone has his own little bag of beefs.

Cordially invited Isn't the invitation cordial if rendered at all?

Flammable and inflammable Yikes! Both mean the same thing and our secretary caught me on this. I think now I'll just write the dern thing is fireproof. But look at competent and incompetent, sufficient and insufficient, adequate and inadequate, and on and on.

Wide variety This really gets to me. Sometimes I wish advertisers would just say "we have a hell of a lot to pick from . . ." and let it go at that.

Quotes	Ugh! Talk about inconsistency. Why are semicolons and question marks outside the closing quote when on the other hand the period of the sentence is inside the closing quotes even if a single word at the end of the sentence is a quote.
Too much capitalization	I explain some words are common nouns no matter how much they may bear on the copy. I use the example of church or university when no specific institution is discussed.
General public	I have heard of numerous generals, but I am at a complete loss to know who general public could be!
Numbers	Sometime before I lay my pencil down for the last time, I hope the entire nation could set a standard we could all know and use.
Very good Very much	Very phooey!

I'll add quotes to what I said about numbers. They give me a lot of inconsistencies. Elvin says he wishes he had a younger and more pliable editor who knew how to use quotes properly. I get a lot of kidding because of my blue pencilling, but I tell them they cost 30¢ each and were it not for the high cost of pencils, I would really mark them up.

I didn't think of this, but recently I heard a radio commentator describe how people so perfunctorily meet one another in their daily pursuits and by rote ask "How are you"? The respondent replies "Fine, how are you"? (Note position of quotes.) Then the original speaker's rejoinder is "Fine," and each go onward totally absorbed in their own thoughts.

The suggestion was made that the respondent could say his wife had gone home to mother, the kids flunked out of school, his check was garnisheed which resulted in the loss of his job, and then the finance company repossessed the car.

The commentator observed the listener would probably say "Fine," and continue on. I am inclined to agree.

Up With the Establishment

Well I am not going to adorn myself with a beard, bell, and headband (my wife would go home to mother) and eschew myself from the Establishment, but I think it is always fun to think of more descriptive words and newer terms so some of those threadbare expressions could properly be laid to rest.

So, dear reader, if you have been able to read this little paper this far, I appreciate it very much because I have covered a wide variety of things with the purpose of telling to you that I do not deem it to make very much of a significant difference in editing the first half last, or the last half first. I hope that what I have written on these pages will be of help and assistance in your work with the general public, etc.