

Editing in the Age of Information

Just 20 years ago, most people's daily media diet was limited to a single newspaper, three television networks and a few radio stations. Today, most of us have access to an incredible bounty of choices, thanks in large part to cable and satellite television and the World Wide Web. With the proliferation of cell phones, palm computers and other mobile devices, we can stay plugged in to this flood of information virtually any place, any time.

Despite the increased availability of information, however, we don't have any more time today than our counterparts did in the past. That means most people are looking for the fastest route to the information they need.

For all the buzzwords of this Information Age — broadband, interactivity, community — one important concept is rarely discussed: editing. As Washington Post columnist William Raspberry has written:

We now have access to information that was beyond our ability to even *desire* — overseas stock market reports, foreign news, speeches, technical reports, even books. In no time at all, it will be possible to get same-day — even same-*hour* — information on military adventures, political crises, ethnic confrontations and natural disasters in countries whose names we hardly know. ... And what we will need then more than ever is someone to play the editor's function: to sort it out, tell us what truly matters, what the trends seem to be.¹

Editors are also vital in making sure that information is accurate. Consider some recent cases of poorly edited information:

- During summer 2000, the New York Times published a Page One article with the lead: "The North Pole is melting." The article reported that for the first time, "The thick ice that has for ages covered the Arctic Ocean has turned to water." Ten days later, the Times reported that the historic event wasn't quite so historic: It happens every summer.
- Glamour magazine offered five hints for reducing the likelihood of getting yeast infections while pregnant. One hint was to "take 500-mg boric acid tablets (also sold in health food stores) three times a day with meals." If readers had taken

that advice, they could have died. The mistake was realized shortly after the magazine hit the stands; many stores immediately pulled it off the shelves.

- A Detroit News article about author Toni Morrison winning the Nobel Prize for Literature was accompanied by a photograph supposedly showing the black writer, then in her 60s. By mistake, the photograph in the first 20,000 copies off the presses pictured a slightly different woman: Madonna.²
- An ad for a set of six miniature suits of armor from the Franklin Mint included some historical information on the armor — but as a newspaper column pointed out,³ much of the “history” was incorrect. For example, the armor from the era of Spartacus, who died in 71 B.C., was dated A.D. 110, nearly two centuries later. The ad copy also noted the Black Prince’s triumph during the Tudor period in England — which did not begin until 81 years after his death. It also referred to “The fight to choose a Shogun in old Japan” — but shogunates were inherited, not won in battle.
- A mix-up by The Associated Press — compounded by overeager editors at Reuters — resulted in release of an obituary for entertainer Bob Hope in 1998. Hope, who learned of the obit while eating breakfast, didn’t let the report keep him from heading out for a day of golf.
- A “commencement speech” advising graduates to wear sun screen and attributed to Kurt Vonnegut was published on Internet news sites — but turned out to be neither a commencement speech nor the work of the well-known author.
- On election day 1998, ABC news posted complete state-by-state election “returns” on its Web site — before the polls had even opened.⁴
- A special issue of Newsweek focusing on “Your Child” recommended that infants as young as 5 months old be allowed to feed themselves zwieback and carrot chunks — an action that could cause the children to choke. After the mistake was pointed out, Newsweek recalled several hundred thousand copies from newsstands, hospitals and doctors’ offices and reprinted and redistributed the issue.⁵
- A huge ad plastered on the sides of Washington, D.C., buses to encourage children to stay in school read “DC Public Schools Wants You!!! Go to Class — It’s a Blast!!!”

Obviously, none of this information was very useful — and in two cases could have proven deadly.

Poor editing can alienate an audience in other ways, too, as in this excerpt from a letter sent to a longtime supporter of a major Shakespeare festival:

Your previous year’s contribution of \$75.00 was not generous and meaningful. This year we ask that you consider not only renewing your membership but raising it to the next level.

Hundreds of other contributors got similar letters. One unintended word (“not”) left some contributors so upset that the letter became the subject of local television news coverage — the wrong kind of publicity for an arts organization trying to create a good public image.

In the worst cases, poor editing allows libelous, unsubstantiated statements to be printed, needlessly destroying a person or company's reputation and costing the source millions of dollars in a libel suit.

To some extent, it's the job of everyone involved in the business of communication to make sure the audience receives accurate information. If you're planning on a career in journalism, news media, advertising or public relations, editing will be part of your job. The ability to communicate accurately and clearly is necessary for every type of media job. Whether you're writing memos to co-workers or letters to the public, reporting information or trying to sell a product, you must get the details right and make sure readers can understand the message. This book is designed to give you the skills and knowledge necessary to meet that challenge.

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Working as an Editor

For some people, the job of sifting, evaluating and verifying information is exciting enough for them to choose a career as an editor. I find this every time I teach my editing course. On the first day, I'll ask my students if any of them are planning to become an editor. They all look at me as though I must have forgotten to take my medication; rarely does anyone raise a hand. Toward the end of the course, though, a surprising thing happens: First one student, then another will pull me aside, well out of earshot of the rest of the class, and admit to considering a job in editing.

As someone who has worked as an editor and taught editing for more than two decades, I don't find that surprising. Actually, there are plenty of other reasons a sane person would consider a career in editing:

- Working as an editor puts you in the middle of things. As an editor, you find out what's happening in the world before virtually anyone else. Being on top of breaking news and choosing how to present it to your audience is an exciting pursuit.
- Editing jobs also offer you the chance to make a difference. Ultimately, editing is all about selection. A job as an editor offers you the chance to showcase information that you believe your audience needs to know, news that may otherwise never be called to their attention.
- Working as an editor is one of the best ways to improve as a writer. When you constantly confront errors of all kinds and need to figure out ways to correct them, you can't help but become a more careful and better writer yourself.
- Few other communication jobs pay as well. Remember the law of supply and demand? Well, there's an ever-growing demand for editors, and few people have the right combination of skills and desire to fill them. As a result, while beginning workers in most media occupations start at salaries in the mid-\$20,000 range, a beginning editor can make double that or even more. And editing positions provide the pathway to even higher paying and more prestigious positions at most print and online publications.

The Challenges of Editing

Not everyone is cut out to be an editor, however. It's a demanding occupation that is overwhelming for many people. For starters, it requires you to learn a new way of reading. Most of us have been conditioned to skip over typos, missing letters and other problems when we read. In addition, many people don't critically evaluate everything they read. But working as an editor requires careful attention to every word you read, as well as critical evaluation of the information. A good editor is always on the lookout for holes and contradictions.

Editors also are expected to be experts on a wide range of issues. In addition to reading widely and keeping up on current events, good editors see movies, visit museums, attend the theater and travel.

In addition, editors need to be authorities on English style, grammar and usage. Editors must also be strong writers who can cut an article in half without damaging it; rewrite confusing passages; add punch to dull passages; and whittle complex stories into the few words that will fit in a headline.

Editors also must be fair-minded, able to judge the importance of material regardless of their own prejudices. They must be able to spot ethical and legal problems and take whatever action is necessary to correct them.

More and more, editors also are expected to be fluent in graphic communication so that they can package information for easy reader access. Therefore, editors also need to know how to choose and crop photos, design pages for print and the Web, and select or create information graphics.

Good editors must be self-starters who nimbly move from one task to the next with no prodding. Finally, editors must be willing to make decisions and accept the consequences.

That's a long shopping list. But if you feel you've got all the items on it, you'd do well to consider a job as an editor.

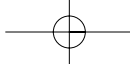
Developing Your Editing Skills

This book is designed to help you master all the editing skills needed to produce clear communication. It approaches editing as a process and takes you through that process just as a working editor goes through it.

The process begins with learning about your readers. You use that knowledge to assign, select and size copy. Copy is then checked for major omissions as well as factual accuracy. You look for legal and ethical problems, as well as issues of sensitivity and taste. Once copy passes all these checkpoints, it can be edited for style, spelling, grammar and punctuation.

The next part of the process is presenting the copy. This phase includes writing headlines, choosing and preparing graphics and photos, and designing pages. Throughout the process, the good editor also strives to bring out the best in every writer. Only when all these steps are completed is the copy ready to be delivered to the reader.

In discussing the process of editing, this book uses a variety of media sources. Examples and exercises throughout the book are drawn from the Internet, magazines, newspapers, newsletters, news releases and advertisements.



Aspiring editors should join the American Copy Editors Society. The organization, established in 1997, has more than 1,000 members from across the country. ACES offers free Web-based courses, discounts on professional seminars, a discussion list, job postings, a list of copy-editing internships and many other resources. The organization's annual conference includes sessions specifically oriented toward students — and plenty of opportunities for job seekers to network. For more information or to join ACES, visit the Web site: www.copydesk.org.

By the time you finish the book and complete the practice exercises, you will be on your way to mastering a multitude of skills that will serve you well in any print media career. And you might just wander up to your editing instructor and whisper, “I’ve been thinking about getting a job as an editor.”

Notes

1. William Raspberry, “An Earful for Editors,” *The Washington Post*, 14 April 2000, sec. A, p. 25.
2. “Names and Faces,” *The Washington Post*, 9 October 1993, sec. D, p. 3.
3. Lois Romano, “The Reliable Source,” *The Washington Post*, 4 March 1993, sec. C, p. 3.
4. Adam Clayton Powell III, “In Election-Eve Mistake, ABC News Posts Complete ‘Election Returns’ on the Web,” *Freedom Forum Online*, 3 November 1998, www.freedomforum.org/technology/1998/11/3abc.asp.
5. Liza Featherstone, “Chucking the Checkers,” *Columbia Journalism Review*, July/August 1997, pp. 12–13.

Job Basics

EDITING FOR THE WEB

If ever a medium has been an editor's medium, the Web is. Online columnist Ethan Casey explains:

While electronic media are not constrained by limits on physical space, both Web and e-mail publishing face a constraint just as demanding, if not more so: the limits of readers' patience and attention spans. This makes the Web an editor's medium, on which an editor puts his or her mark by the exercise of sound judgment and good taste.¹

Online news authority Eric Meyer adds, "The majority of online jobs are in editing or in areas where the skill and mind sets needed are far more similar to those possessed by a typical print copy editor than those possessed by a typical print reporter."

Tom Cekay of the online edition of the Chicago Tribune (www.chicago.tribune.com) concurs, and he adds that good editing is good editing no matter the medium: "The traditional role of the editor stays the same. Do readers want to see this? Is it intelligently done? Is it sophisticated reporting?"²

But, Cekay adds, online work places additional demands on the editor. Gil Asakawa, who moved from newspapers to Digital City's online guide for Denver (www.digitalcity.com/denver), agrees: "My brain is very much into multitasking mode. I need to find some additional RAM chips for my head."³

To be a good online editor, you'll need to:

- **Be computer literate:** Know your way around a computer's operating system, folders, etc. (This applies to all editors, but is particularly important for those working with the Web.)
- **Be Web literate:** Understand how to use different search engines to find information on the Web, then be able to evaluate that information.
- **Know New Media theory:** Be familiar with how people use the Web as well as with nonlinear storytelling and interactivity.
- **Be able to work under constant deadline pressure:** Be comfortable handling the nonstop updates and constant deadlines that come with Web work.
- **Be able to work in teams and communicate clearly:** Know how to work well with others and communicate clearly and effectively. The Web environment is much more team-oriented than print media.
- **Know basic production skills:** At a minimum, you should know basic HTML — the actual code, not just how to use a WYSIWYG program like Front Page — and PhotoShop. Familiarity with digital audio and video production, databases and JavaScript wins you bonus points.



Jim Romenesko keeps readers abreast of media news.

- Be flexible:** Be willing to continue learning. New technologies and new methods of presenting information appear constantly, and the good editor is ready to adapt at a moment's notice. As online news columnist Steve Outing notes, "It's clear that news organizations of the new millennium will be publishing to multiple media: print-delivered, home-printed, the Web, e-mail, PDAs, mobile phones, e-readers (or e-book readers), pagers, Internet radio, and broadcast radio and TV. ... Editors must learn how to craft content packages appropriate to a print edition as well as a PDA edition."⁴

Because of the multimedia nature of their jobs, many editors hired for online publications are called **producers**. The nature of tasks handled by producers varies greatly from one operation to another, depending on staff size, features and other factors. In addition to basic editing and headline writing, producers can be called upon to **repurpose** content from print editions, that is, take material that was printed and repackage it with supplemental material, hypertext links and so on to make it more useful for the Web reader. For example, a travel magazine may run an article about visiting a certain city. An online version of the article could include links to restaurants, shopping, museums, nightlife and galleries, a list of recommended accommodations, and more.

In fact, the new forms of journalism that are developing on the Web depend heavily on editors. For instance, About.com offers a series of pages organized by topics, each hosted by a guide — effectively an editor. Web logs — also known as **blogs** — offer another example of the role of editors in the emerging medium. Blogs are essentially instant messages posted to the Web in which bloggers "comment and link to interesting articles and content that they find on the Web relevant to their chosen topic area, and offer analysis and opinion."⁵

Content Exchange offers daily updates on industry news.



The variety of blogs boggles the imagination, with several focusing specifically on journalism:

- Jim Romenesko's MediaNews (www.poynter.org/medianews)
- Online Journalism Review's Spike Report (ojr.usc.edu/content/spike.cfm)
- Steve Outing's E-Media Tidbits (www.content-exchange.com/weblog/weblog.htm)

As you can see, there's much more to editing for the Web than editing for print. Fortunately, you can find plenty of help in keeping up with the challenges — on the Web, of course. Among the best resources are Web sites of the Online News Association (www.onlinenewsassociation.org), the Poynter Institute for Media Studies (www.poynter.org), the Newspaper Association of America's Digital Edge (www.digitaledge.org), Ethan Casey's "The Online Editor" column (www.content-exchange.com/spotlight) and the Content Exchange's daily roundup of news about online news (www.content-exchange.com/cx/html/contentnews.html).

Most online editors find their work extremely rewarding. As Gil Asakawa told Editor & Publisher Interactive, "I love this industry."⁶ Chances are good that you will, too.

Notes

1. Ethan Casey, "It's an Editor's Medium, Stupid," Content Exchange, 26 February 2001, www.content-exchange.com/cx/html/newsletter/2-20/oe2-20.htm.
2. Christopher Harper, "Doing It All," American Journalism Review, December 1996, pp. 24–29.

3. Steve Outing, "A Newspaper Editor's Transition to New Media," Editor & Publisher Interactive, 18 October 1996, www.mediainfo.com/ephome/news/newshtm/stop/st101896.htm.
4. Steve Outing, "Online News Advice for 2001," Editor & Publisher Interactive, 27 December 2000, www.mediainfo.com/ephome/news/newshtm/stop/st122700.htm.
5. Steve Outing, "Corante's Mission: 'Professionalize' Web Logs," Content Exchange, 29 January 2001, www.content-exchange.com/cx/html/newsletter/2-18/wb2-18.htm.
6. Outing, "A Newspaper Editor's Transition."

Editor's Corner

An Editor Who Writes, a Writer Who Edits

When Thom Lieb, the author of this book, asked me to write a sidebar on the importance of editing, I was both flattered and apprehensive. The last time I submitted anything to Thom in writing (as a college student in one of his writing classes), it came back with a lot of red ink.

However, as much as I cringed at that red ink in college, I realize that I, too, have used it a lot in my career. I have employed editing skills in a wide variety of positions from reporter to public relations practitioner to magazine editor to freelance writer and editor.

As a freelance writer and editor, I want to submit my work in the best possible condition. That means editing and re-editing the copy until I am satisfied that it is as nearly perfect as can be. Companies hire freelancers to save time and better use in-house resources. Having to spend countless hours cleaning up a freelancer's work defeats the purpose.

As the editor of a monthly technical magazine, I edited technical articles written by metallurgical engineers — not professional writers — who often needed help organizing and presenting their work. Before focusing on the nitty gritty of punctuation, I first had to look at the bigger picture: Does this article make sense? Does it say what the author intended it to say? Are there any holes that need to be filled? Does the copy need to be updated?

Besides editing technical papers, I also wrote semitechnical and nontechnical articles for the magazine. Unlike most writers who must write at the sixth-grade level, I had to write for readers who have master's degrees or doctorates. Editing for clear communication was a must. If I didn't catch an error, I knew they would.

I also edited copy from contributors and wrote headlines, cutlines and cover blurbs, as well as laid out the magazine. And, since I was manager of communications, I also oversaw my organization's public relations, marketing, Internet and graphics functions. Having an editor's eye helped in each one of these areas.



Beth P. Gavaghan,
freelance writer
and editor

Each has the goals of capturing the readers' attention and disseminating information in a concise, effective and attractive manner. From the public relations side, the communication goal also is to motivate people to act (attend a conference, buy a technical book, etc.).

In fact, just about every activity in the communications field shares most of these goals. As a newspaper reporter, I had to edit myself before my copy went to the copy editor. I had to make sure the who, what, when, where and why were present and high in each article. I had to check the spelling of names of companies, people and places. I had to make sure that there were transitions between paragraphs and that tenses matched. And, most of all, I had to make sure the articles were balanced.

I used the same skills when I worked in public relations. I had to have the correct particulars about events and honors. I had to make sense. And I couldn't misspell my company's or clients' names.

Through several years of using editing skills, I've picked up a few tricks that help. One that I find useful is to read copy backward, paragraph by paragraph or sentence by sentence. No, there won't be a message from Satan, but you will be forced to focus on every word. Try it; it works.

Above all else, I've learned that most of the errors in communicating can be solved simply by paying attention. So my advice to all future editors is this: Be careful — and watch out for the red ink.

GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Stylebooks and Dictionaries

The remaining chapters of this book look at editing on the *macro* level. At that level, editors question facts, check organization, look for bias and legal problems, and so on.

Once macro editing is finished, *micro* editing begins. This process involves looking for misspelled words, checking grammar, eliminating redundancies, and doing a great deal of other housecleaning. In order to edit successfully at the micro level, editors must master spelling, grammar and word usage. These areas are the topics of the Grammar School sections that follow each chapter. In this first installment, we begin by taking a look at the editor's bibles: the stylebook and dictionary.

The ad has to go to publication in a half hour, your desk is its last stop and you can't for the life of you remember if "toward" or "towards" is grammatically correct. The only thing you DO know is that if you choose the wrong one, there's a college professor out there who will clip your work from a newspaper or a magazine and hold it up in his class as an example of poor editing.

I know because I took that editing class in college. I was planning on going into advertising, not journalism, so I wasn't entirely sure of its relevance to my future career. But it was required. So, dutifully, I trudged to class at 8 a.m. three days a week for 50 minutes of copyediting, copyediting and, you guessed it, more copyediting.

I left that class with the ability to spot a misplaced comma or a wayward capital letter from miles away. I also left with dog-eared and battered copies of the AP Stylebook and Webster's Dictionary.

The bookstore wouldn't buy them back. And for that, I will be forever grateful. On the way out the door to my first day of work as an advertising copywriter, I grabbed them (mostly so my desk wouldn't be completely empty).

They have proven to be priceless possessions, the final, unbending word for any spelling, punctuation, style or abbreviation question co-workers can throw my way. (You don't think you actually retain all that stuff after the final exam, do you?) Most importantly though, I would hope that, for now, they have kept my work from ending up as the example in someone's college editing class.

Oh, and in case you were wondering, the answer is "toward." (It's on Page 198 in my stylebook.)

Erin Hardesty is a copywriter for Azzam Jordan Advertising.

The AP Stylebook and a Good Dictionary: Don't Leave College Without Them



Erin Hardesty

Stylebooks

Many problems in grammar and usage are covered in stylebooks that editors and other media workers use. So it seems only logical to start by taking a look at stylebooks and how to use them.

Stylebooks fall into two general types:

1. Guides to scholarly and technical writing: This category includes the Chicago Manual of Style, the MLA Handbook, the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association and others. They are used most often for preparing research papers, journal articles and books, and they therefore include extensive rules for using references and bibliographies. But they also are used in the media. For example, a survey of 20 trade and consumer magazines found that five of them use the Chicago Manual of Style.¹

2. Guides for media work: This category includes The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law, The Washington Post Deskbook on Style, and The New York Times Manual of Style and Usage. These titles usually are used in newspaper, newsletter, magazine and public relations work. The Associated Press Stylebook is the most widely used stylebook in media work. Many publications also use an organizational style sheet, or a supplemental guide to local matters that are not covered in general stylebooks.

Guides to scholarly and technical writing typically are organized by general topics: capitalization, citations, etc. Guides for media work are set up alphabetically, like dictionaries, but the substance of the entries varies greatly, as the following examples from The Associated Press Stylebook show:

- Some entries include only a word or two, to indicate the correct or preferred spelling, or the preferred capitalization:

insofar as

IOU, IOUs

- Other entries add information on the use of the word or words:

infant applicable to children through 12 months old.

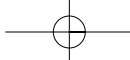
- Other entries provide guidance for the use of abbreviations and acronyms:

Internal Revenue Service IRS is acceptable on second reference. [That means after it appears spelled out once in a story.] Capitalize also Internal Revenue, but lowercase the revenue service.

- Other entries give background information:

Index of Leading Economic Indicators A composite of 10 economic measurements that was developed to help forecast likely shifts in the U.S. economy as a whole. It is compiled by the Conference Board, a private business-sponsored research group.

As a media worker, you probably won't be expected to memorize a stylebook, but you do need to know rules that you'll use every day, and you need to know how



to find the information you need in the least amount of time. Four guidelines can help you use your stylebook efficiently:

- 1. Start by learning the basics:** Any stylebook should provide guidance in four essential areas that you'll use almost daily: abbreviations, capitalization, numbers and punctuation. Learn these rules and you'll save many hours on deadline looking them up over and over again.
- 2. Don't assume you know the correct style:** Just because you've seen a word handled in a certain way doesn't mean your stylebook says that that's the way to do it. If you don't know what your stylebook says, you need to look it up.
- 3. Always start your stylebook search by being as specific as possible:** Chances are that you will find information related to a topic in several places throughout the stylebook. But usually the fastest way to get the answer you need is by looking up the precise word or phrase. For example, if you are not sure whether to capitalize the word "senator," look for an entry under either "capitalization" or "senator." If you can't find your answer there, broaden your search, little by little; try congress, legislative bodies, politics, titles, etc., until you find it.
- 4. Read the entire entry:** Many stylebook entries include a rule and exceptions to it — and sometimes exceptions to the exceptions. Nothing is more frustrating than finding the correct entry, reading the first paragraph, following those instructions, then getting chewed out because your case was one of the exceptions covered in the *second* paragraph. Always read an entry in its entirety.

If you don't know what your stylebook says, you need to look it up.

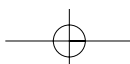
Spelling

Your stylebook should always be the first place you look when you have spelling questions as well as style questions. The stylebook functions as the Supreme Court: If it lists a spelling as correct, that's the one to use. In most cases, though, your stylebook will be silent on matters of spelling. That's when you need a good dictionary.

Why not just use the spell-checking feature of your word-processing program? In some ways, such technologies make it easier for misspellings to hit print, as the following poem, which has circulated for years in the journalistic community, demonstrates:

A Pome

I have a spelling checker,
It came with my PC;
It plainly marks four my revue
Mistakes I cannot sea.
I've run this pome threw it,
I'm sure your please to no,
It's letter perfect in it's weigh,
My checker tolled me sew.²



When writers and editors let spelling errors slip through, readers notice.

As this “pome” shows, our language is unbelievably difficult. Part of that difficulty stems from the fact that about 80 percent of all English words are derived from foreign sources, ranging from Arabic to Swedish. The result is a language in which words spelled with the same letters — such as bough, cough, dough, rough and through — sound completely different. And words that sound nearly the same — such as beer and bear, ball and bawl, they’re and their — have completely different meanings.

When writers and editors let spelling errors slip through, readers notice. A three-year study by the American Society of Newspaper Editors reported that readers’ top complaint was “too many factual errors and grammar or spelling mistakes.” Those mistakes undermine reader confidence, undoing a lot of the good work done by writers and editors.³

The complexity of English has caused even such masters of the language as Mark Twain to complain about expectations that everyone spell words the same way. “I don’t see any use in spelling a word right and never did,” he told those gathered at a spelling bee in 1875. “We might as well make all clothes alike and cook all dishes alike. Sameness is tiresome. Variety is pleasing.”

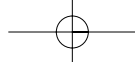
If all communications were private ones — keeping diaries, for instance, or writing shopping lists — such anarchy could flourish. But for people writing and editing for the mass media, using the preferred spellings of words is the only way to ensure that they’re properly understood by a large audience. Misspellings reflect poorly on those who publish them. Many people would be at least a little hesitant about dining in a restaurant that advertised a \$17.95 dinner that included “1/2 giraffe” of wine, or buying a very expensive CD player from a company that quotes a review as saying the player is “Quiet simply the best we’ve ever heard.”

To make sure that prospective employees can get their messages across, many media companies include spelling quizzes in job interviews. So what hope is there for the spelling-impaired? One route would be to memorize the half-million words in the Oxford English Dictionary. A more reasonable approach, though, is to keep a dictionary at hand *and not hesitate to use it*. Unless you are 100 percent sure that you know how to spell a word, look it up. Experience shows that you often will find you didn’t know how to spell the word even when you were 100 percent sure. In addition, you always should look up words you haven’t seen before. And you should make a quick-reference list — maybe on the inside cover of your dictionary — of words that you always have to look up.

In this age of the Internet, of course there’s a Web site that promises fast relief to editors suffering from spelling headaches — or jargon overload. Your Dictionary (www.yourdictionary.com) offers basic dictionary and thesaurus functions, but complements them with more than 200 foreign language dictionaries, more than 30 multilingual dictionaries and more than 50 specialty dictionaries, spanning a range from aviation to theater.

A few hints on using the dictionary:

1. If your organization uses a stylebook, always check it *before* consulting the dictionary; the stylebook has the final say. In the case of guarantee and guaranty, for example, The Associated Press Stylebook says to use the latter only in proper names.



2. Use the largest dictionary you can afford. Bigger dictionaries contain (surprise!) more words and are therefore more useful.
3. Get the same dictionary that others on your staff use. While virtually all dictionaries have “Webster’s” in their names, the use of that word is meaningless. Words and even spellings differ among “Webster’s” dictionaries. Webster’s Third New International Dictionary (G. & C. Merriam Co.) is one common standard. Webster’s New World Dictionary is less comprehensive but widely used among media workers.
4. When two or more spellings are listed for an entry, use the first. If you find two spellings in separate entries,
 - a. and only one is followed by a full definition (e.g., *espresso*) and the other is followed by “same as ... ” (e.g., *expresso*), use the spelling accompanied by the full definition.
 - b. and both entries include definitions (e.g., *guarantee* and *guaranty*), you can use either — unless your stylebook says otherwise.

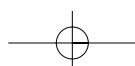
While those rules will help you arrive at the correct spellings eventually, the fewer words you have to look up, the better use you’ll make of your editing time — and the better you’ll do on a spelling quiz for a job. The following list includes hints that should help you in many spelling predicaments. These spelling rules have been compiled from “Spell It Right!” (Harry Shaw Harper Mass Market Paperbacks, 1994; “Beyond the ‘SP’ Label” (Patricia J. McAlexander, Ann B. Dobie and Noel Gregg, National Council of Teachers of English, 1992); and “Working With Words: A Handbook for Media Writers and Editors” (Brian S. Brooks, James L. Pinson and Jean Gaddy Wilson, Bedford Books, 1999).

I Before E. You’ve heard it a million times, but it’s worth hearing again. When you’re not sure if a word should be spelled *ie* or *ei*:

- If the sound is a long *e* sound (e.g., *shriek*), the *i* comes before the *e* unless those letters follow *c*. So it’s *fiend*, *piece* and *retrieve*, but *conceive*, *deceit* and *receipt*.
- If the sound is a long *a* sound (e.g., *vein*), *e* comes before *i*.
- Several words are exceptions to this rule. Among the most often used: *ancient*, *caffeine*, *counterfeit*, *either*, *Fahrenheit*, *fiery*, *foreign*, *forfeit*, *height*, *leisure*, *neither*, *protein*, *seize*, *weird*.

Plurals. Add *s* to make a noun into its plural, unless it falls under one of the following exceptions:

- Nouns that end in *y* preceded by a consonant change the *y* to *i* in forming plurals. *Activity* becomes *activities*, *fly* becomes *flies*, etc. On the other hand, nouns that end in *y* preceded by a vowel usually add an *s* without changing the final *y* to form a plural. *Attorney* becomes *attorneys*, *money* becomes *moneys*.



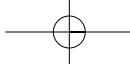
- Nouns that end in a single *f* usually change the *f* to *v* and add *es* (e.g., *shelf/shelves*, *leaf/leaves*, *wolf/wolves*). However, some words merely add *s* (*roof*, *roofs*), so it's best to check.
- Nouns that end in *ch*, *sh*, *s*, *x* and *z* add *es*: *churches*, *dishes*, *bosses*, *boxes*.
- Nouns that end in *o* preceded by a consonant in some cases take an *s*, in others, an *es*: *pianos*, *potatoes*. Always check the dictionary. But nouns that end in *o* preceded by a vowel simply add *s* to form a plural: *radio* becomes *radios*.
- Acronyms and abbreviations also add an *s* to form the plural: *IOUs*, *VIPs*.
- Many words are irregular. *Woman*, for instance, becomes *women*, *goose* becomes *geese*, and *fish* remains *fish*. If you're not sure, always check.

Adding Suffixes. Suffixes are attached to the ends of words: *-ing*, *-ful*, *-able*, *-ible*, *-ly*, *-ment*, *-ness* and others. A few rules will help you make the right connections.

- Suffixes that begin with a consonant typically are added to the root word. Two important exceptions:
 1. Words (other than *public*) that end in *ic* add *al* before adding *ly* (e.g., *tragically*, *dramatically*).
 2. Words ending in *ue* drop the final *e* when a suffix beginning with a consonant is added (e.g., *argument*, *truly*).
- If a word ends with a silent *e* (e.g., *hate*), keep the *e* if the suffix begins with a consonant (e.g., *hateful*), but drop it if the suffix begins with a vowel (e.g., *hating*).
- When you add a suffix to a noun that ends in *y* preceded by a consonant, change the *y* to *i* unless the suffix begins with *i* (e.g., *buried*, *fanciful*, *happier*; *trying*, *dying*).
- Words that can stand without the suffix add *-able* (e.g., *acceptable*, *agreeable*); words that cannot stand on their own add *-ible* (e.g., *credible*, *terrible*). While most stand-alone words that end with an *e* drop it before adding *-able* (e.g., *recognizable*, *desirable*), some keep the *e* (e.g., *traceable*). Your best bet is to check the dictionary.
- Verbs that end in a silent *e* drop the *e* when adding a suffix (e.g., *bore/boring*, *gaze/gazed* — the *e* comes from the suffix).
- One-syllable verbs that have short vowel sounds and do not end with a silent *e* double the last letter when adding a suffix (e.g., *spin/spinning*, *cram/crammed*).

Confusing Endings. Only five common words end in *-eed* (*succeed*, *proceed*, *indeed*, *exceed*, *deed*); putting together the first letter of each word spells "SPIED." All others end in *-ede* (e.g., *impede*, *precede*).

Only six common words end in *-ery* (*cemetery*, *confectionery*, *distillery*, *millinery*, *monastery*, *stationery*). All others end in *-ary* (e.g., *boundary*, *dictionary*).

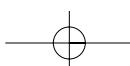
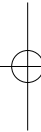
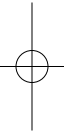


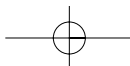
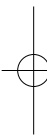
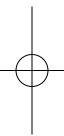
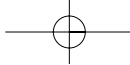
Only four common words end in *-efy* (*liquefy*, *putrefy*, *rarefy*, *stupefy*). All others take *-ify* (e.g., *mollify*, *solidify*).

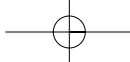
Joining Words. Don't delete letters when joining complete words together, even when the last letter of the first word is the same as the first letter of the second word (e.g., *bookkeeper*, *roommate*, *barroom*, *withhold*, *misspell*).

Notes

1. "Style File," Folio., 1 February 1994, p. 26.
2. Harriet P. Gross, "The CopyRighter," Press Woman, February 1993, p. 17.
3. E.R. Shipp, "Taking Our Measure," The Washington Post, 20 December 1998, sec. C. p. 6.







Exercise

Correct all of the spelling and style errors in the following article.

It use to be that getting a Bachelor's degree guaranteed getting a good job. But in today's economy, graduateing students are finding out that there are to many degrees for two few jobs.

"You have to have more than a degree if you want to have an advantadge over your competition," warns Eleanor Platt, Director of the placement office at Cecil Co. community college. "You have to be able to show an employer that your the number one candidate for the job."

Platt recomends students take several steps while still in college:

1. Take advantadge of on-campus opportunities. All most every student can find an on-campus organziation to join that will offer experience and contacts.
2. Get a internship. After completeing the basic courses in a major, a student should investigate internship oportunities. Internships are another means of net-working, and many open the door to jobs after gradution. Whether done formerly or informally, whether for four wks. or four mos., internships are great assetts.
3. Volunter. Employers like self-starters. volunter work shows initiative and maturity. Yet only about eight per cent of all students do any volunter work, Platt says.

Let everyone no when your looking for work. Being in the rite place at the right time is more important than ever. Let your teachers, relatives and fellow students know when you're going to be looking for work, and they might be abel to help you find it.

