



Twitter hashtags:  
@cybertext  
#writersUA

# EDITING

11 March 2012

Rhonda Bracey

# It's not as easy as it looks...

2

*“Editing is just as difficult as writing.  
Probably even more difficult.”*

*Editing is a balancing act [between]  
cleaning up a piece of writing while keeping  
[it] true to its intentions.”*

From: <http://scottnesbitt.net/weblog/2010/02/22/editing-the-secret-to-good-writing/>

## Role of the editor

*@ashleyfullstop's Tweet from this morning's Adobe session:*

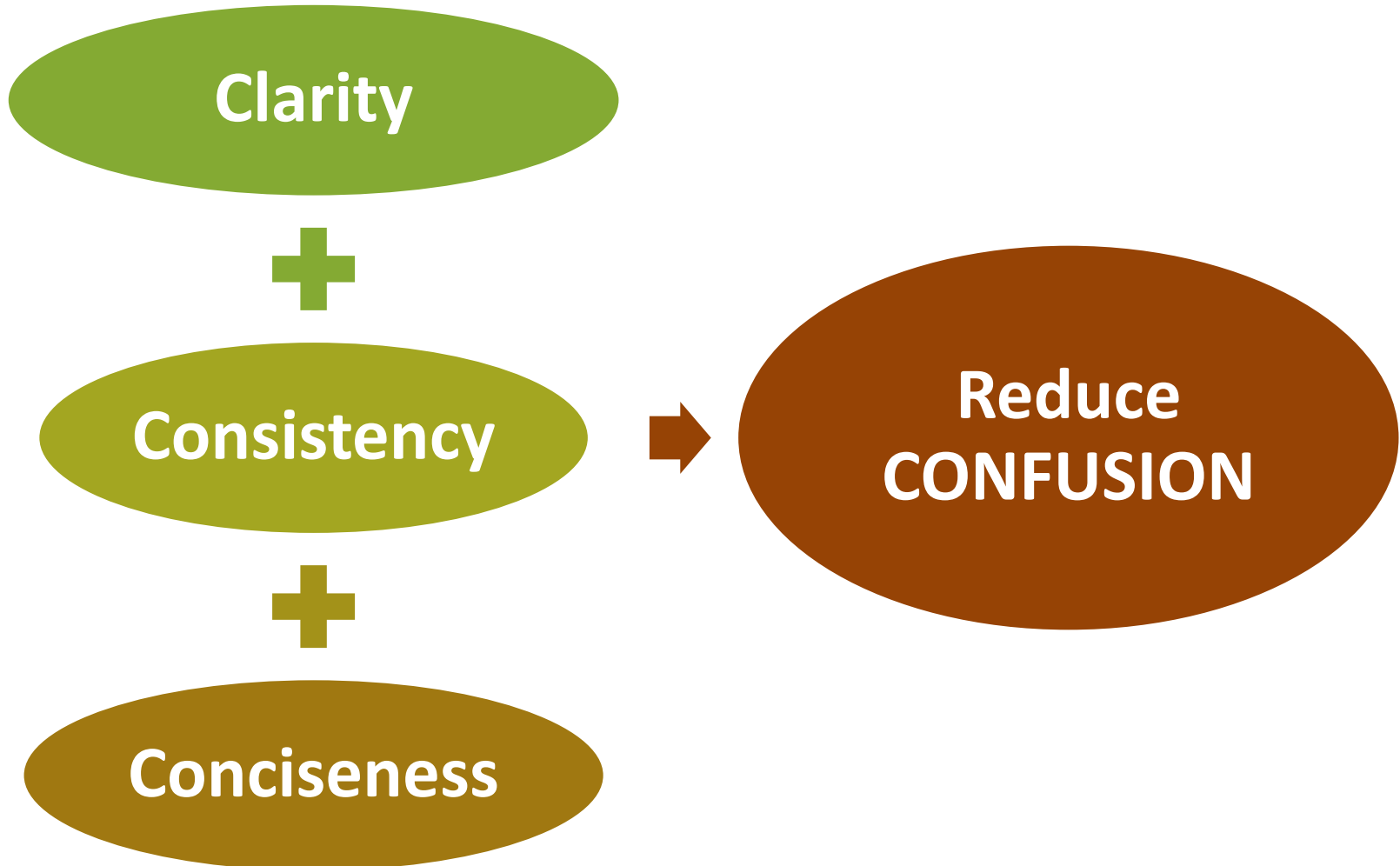
“Anku Jain: An editor's true value is in enhancing and improving content – not in being the grammar police!”

Takeaways:

- ❑ Editors assist the writer/developer by fixing errors and/or suggesting improvements
- ❑ Editors make the UA easier for the reader to understand/navigate

# Three C's of communication

4



# What can you edit?

5

## User assistance

- e.g. online Help, UI text, error messages, screencasts

## Marketing communications

- e.g. website, white papers, feature lists, blog posts, social media profiles/content

## Developer/Business Analyst doco

- e.g. specifications, project plans

## Internal policies and procedures

- e.g. employee handbooks, disaster recovery procedures

... in fact, anything for your internal and external customers!

# In the UA, an editor can identify...

6

- Incorrect grammar, spelling, and punctuation
- Unclear or potentially misunderstood user prompts and error messages
- Illogical task flows
- Inconsistently labeled buttons, icons, fields, dialog boxes
- Inconsistently placed buttons, icons, fields, dialog boxes
- Required or unnecessary tasks, fields, dialog boxes
- Inconsistencies between dialog boxes

(Adapted from: <http://writeorrevisedaily.wordpress.com/2012/01/04/add-value-to-gui-design/>)

# Types of UA editing

## Takeaways:

- ❑ Rules-based (aka copy editing)
- ❑ Analysis-based (aka content editing or substantive editing)
- ❑ Technical editing

# 'Rules-based' editing

8

- ❖ Uses internal/external standards and guidelines to make the UA **correct, consistent, accurate, and complete**; e.g.:
  - spelling, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, hyphenation
  - adherence to legal requirements (e.g. copyright, trademarks)
  - design consistency (e.g. typography, layout).
  
- ❖ **Editor's role: Fix**

(Adapted from Jean Weber: <http://techwhirl.com/articles/working-with-a-technical-editor/>)



# But...

9



Rules-based editing is not enough—the UA can still be inappropriate for the intended audience

# 'Analysis-based' editing

10

- ❖ Evaluates UA to make it more functional and appropriate for its readers
- ❖ Looks at **concept, content, organization, flow, style**
- ❖ **Editor's role:** Suggest improvements rather than make corrections

(Adapted from Jean Weber: <http://techwhirl.com/articles/working-with-a-technical-editor/>)

# Technical editing

11

- ❖ Involves testing **every step of every procedure** in the UA/Help against the software/hardware product
- ❖ Must suspend existing knowledge of product and follow documented steps exactly
- ❖ Can take a LOT of time for a complex product
- ❖ **Editor's role:** Report mismatches, inaccuracies to author for correction

# UA editing tasks

## Takeaways:

- ❑ Editing comprises many tasks, which require several passes to cover all items on checklist
- ❑ Editing is tiring—take regular breaks

# It's not a one-off task

13

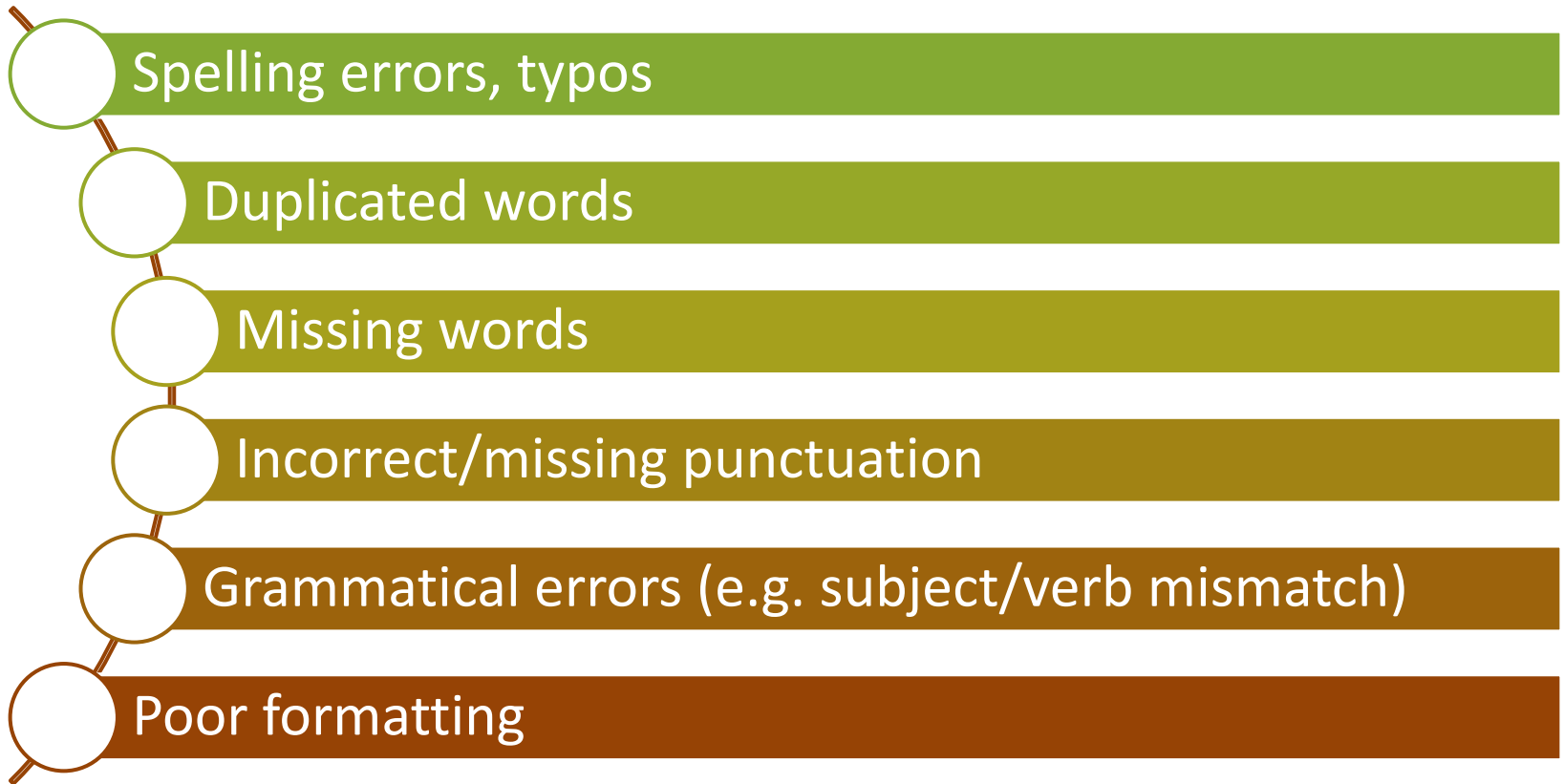
- ❖ Several passes—one for each group of elements (e.g. spelling, layout, capitalization, legal, styles, abbreviations...)
- ❖ Tackle one or only a few issues at a time
- ❖ Editing is tiring—take breaks, refocus your eyes



# Example copy editing tasks

14

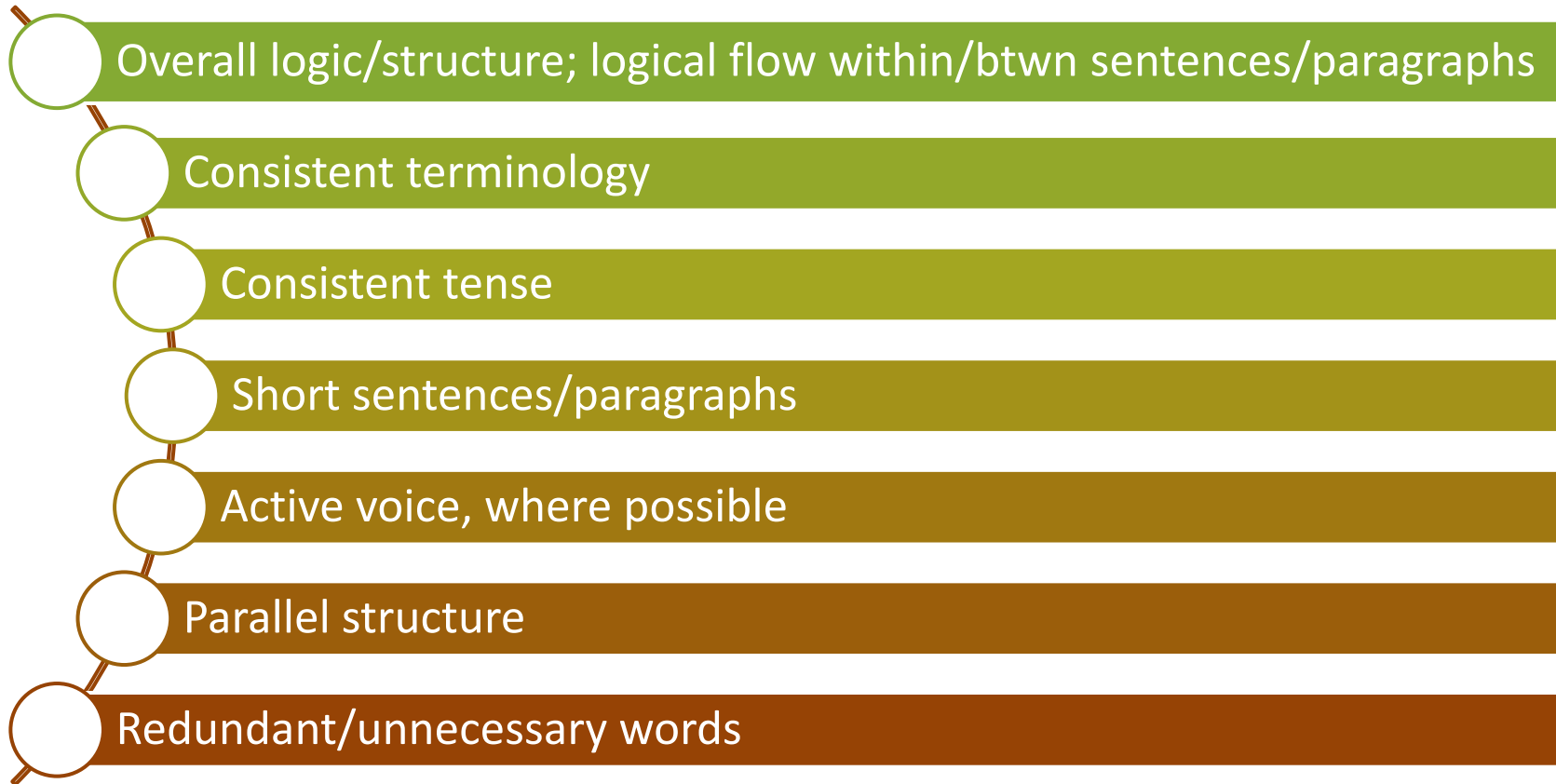
Check for:

- 
- Spelling errors, typos
  - Duplicated words
  - Missing words
  - Incorrect/missing punctuation
  - Grammatical errors (e.g. subject/verb mismatch)
  - Poor formatting

# Example content editing tasks

15

## Check for:

- 
- Overall logic/structure; logical flow within/btwn sentences/paragraphs
  - Consistent terminology
  - Consistent tense
  - Short sentences/paragraphs
  - Active voice, where possible
  - Parallel structure
  - Redundant/unnecessary words

# Example...

16

Anchoring procedures shall include:

- maintenance of anchors in the correct configuration to suit activity
- ensuring all the rigging used for running anchors is certified fit-for-purpose
- regular inspection of anchor lines to ensure they are in good condition
- monitoring of anchor tension, payout speed and all anchoring equipment
- monitoring of anchor tension to ensure anchors are holding appropriately
- tracking and recording of anchor movement and anchor drop
- efficient placement of anchors and reduced length of anchor sweep
- use of tide, current, wind and other data to determine the appropriate placement of anchors and to ensure anchoring operations suit the conditions undertaken.



# Edits showing tracked changes

17

- Shall vs will (delete it if already occurring)
- Parallel structure: -ing verbs
- Unnecessary words

Anchoring procedures ~~shall~~will include:

- maintenance ~~of~~ing anchors in the correct configuration, undertaken
- ensuring all ~~the~~ rigging used for running anchors is certified, fit-for-purpose
- regularly inspect~~ing~~en anchor lines to ensure they are in good condition
- monitoring ~~of~~ anchor tension, payout speed and all anchoring operations
- monitoring ~~of~~ anchor tension to ensure anchors are holding and
- tracking and recording ~~of~~ anchor movement and anchor drop
- efficiently placement ~~of~~ing anchors and ~~reduced~~ ~~reducing~~ ~~the~~ minimise wire/chain sweep
- ~~use~~ ~~of~~ing tide, current, wind and other data to determine the correct depth for running anchors and to ensure anchoring operations suit the conditions for the operations undertaken.

# Tighten up!



18

Before	After	Comments
...in close proximity to...	...close to... ...near... (or even better, be specific about the distance)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>proximity</i> is a synonym for <i>nearness</i>, so <i>close proximity</i> is redundant. It is simpler to say <i>close to</i> or <i>near</i> – and easier for your readers to understand.</li><li>• These terms are very fuzzy – does <i>close proximity/close to/near</i> mean 10 inches, 10 yards, 10 miles? If you can, be specific as to the distance.</li></ul>
The major systems ... are summarised below:	The major systems ... are:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Often, <i>summarised below</i> (and <i>the following</i>) can be deleted from a bullet list intro without affecting meaning.</li></ul>

(From: <http://cybertext.wordpress.com/2011/11/10/tighten-up-your-writing-by-removing-redundantunnecessary-words/>)

# About editing procedures

19

Check for:

## Logic and sequence

- Numbered steps in correct order, with sub-bulleted options
- Easier to read (skim/scan), understand, navigate

## Active voice

- Speaks directly to/instructs the reader
- Implies 'you do this' —e.g. *Click OK.*

## Serious consequences

- List serious consequences before the action (e.g. use *To reformat your computer, click OK.* NOT *Click OK to reformat your computer.*)

## Multiple steps in one

- Each action should have its own step

(Adapted from: [http://www.jeanweber.com/newsite/?page\\_id=44](http://www.jeanweber.com/newsite/?page_id=44))

Describe yourself in 50 words or ~~less~~<sup>X</sup>  
It's 50 words or FEWER actually,  
used for non-countable quantities,  
collective amounts or degrees. Fewer means  
'as many'. The terms are NOT interchangeable.

The dating agency found no matches

20

But beware of being over-pedantic

Perfection is the holy grail, but it is not achievable and should never trump 'getting it done'

# Checklists and style sheets

## Takeaways:

- ❑ Use checklists and style sheets—you can't remember to check everything, every time
- ❑ Style sheets help maintain consistency

# Checklists

22

- ❖ Use checklists to avoid missing anything
- ❖ Share them with your team so they know what you do/look for

<input type="checkbox"/>	Check bullet point lists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Correct formatting applied—lower case initial letter for a run-on description; upper case initial letter only for full sentences or where the bullet list does not have a stem sentence (such as those in a table)</li><li>▪ Second level—square bullet, align bullet with text of higher level bullet point text</li><li>▪ Parallel structure (e.g. imperative versus gerund verbs)</li><li>▪ Remove semicolons at end of bullet points</li><li>▪ Add period to last bullet point</li><li>▪ If an 'or' is used to separate two bullet points, put 'or' on a separate line, no bullet point, aligned left with text of previous bullet point</li><li>▪ Don't use 'and' between bullet points as 'and' is implied</li><li>▪ Watch for single bullet points – bullet point lists should be for two or more items</li></ul>
--------------------------	--------------------------	--

# Style sheets

23

- ❖ Use a style sheet to document decisions that:
  - differ from style guide authority (e.g. CMOS, MMOS)
  - are unique to product/company
- ❖ Very useful for product- /company-specific terminology (e.g. NetForms, Netforms, Net Forms, Net forms)
- ❖ Help maintain consistency of spelling, capitalization, hyphenation, punctuation etc.
- ❖ Detail treatment of UA-specific elements—dialog box names, field names, menu paths, user-entered data, etc.

# Example corporate style guide

24

## 3.3.2 Latin Terms and Abbreviations

Common Latin abbreviations (such as 'e.g.', 'i.e.', 'etc.') can be used as they should be familiar to the audience. Do not italicise these words (exception: italicise *et al.* in a citation).

Use full stops after each letter in 'e.g.' and 'i.e.', and a full stop at the end of 'etc.' There is no need for a comma at the end of the abbreviation.

Other common Latin terms that can be used without explanation include 'ad hoc', 'in situ', 'via', and 'vice versa'. They do not require punctuation as they are not shortened forms. Do not italicise these words.

## 5.4.2 Chemical Names

Chemical abbreviations must use a subscript for the numbers 2, 3, 4 etc.

e.g. CO<sub>2</sub>, H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>, etc.

Do not capitalise chemical compounds when they are listed in full, unless they are the first word of a sentence.

e.g. carbon dioxide, sodium chloride

Use sulfur, sulfuric, sulfate, etc. 'Sulphur' is an obsolete spelling according to The Macquarie Dictionary.



# Example editorial style sheet

25

## Style Sheet: DFAT report

### General:

- Lists: no 'and' at end of penultimate points; no semicolons
- Tables: initial capital for each item in each column; column headings left-justified
- Capitals: no initial capital for 'government', 'parliament', 'minister', 'department', etc. when used generically or when not part of specific title
- Punctuation: single 'smart' quotes; no full stops or spaces with initials
- Date spaces: condensed form when in same decade (2007–09, not 2007–2009, but 2000–2010)

### A

Abu Dhabi

Accelerated Demining Program

anti-personnel

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation group  
(APEC, no 'the')

ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)

*Asian Development Fund Act 1987*

Australia–China Council

Australian Safeguards and Non-Proliferation  
Office (cap. P)

### B

### D

Dhaka

Director General IAEA (no hyphen)

### E

East Asia regional strategy

Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

### F

financial management information system

Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty

fitouts

foot-and-mouth disease

From: Snooks & Co. *Style Manual for authors editors and printers*. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. Commonwealth of Australia, 2002. (p265)

# Tools and resources

## Takeaways:

- ❑ Tools may be useful, but ...
- ❑ Your eyes and brain are the best tools you have!

# About Word add-ins

27

- ❖ Many specialist editing tools are add-ins for Word only
- ❖ May have to publish content to Word, run the tool, then either republish changed Word file to the required output OR make suggested changes in authoring tool
- ❖ May be too hard! Use trial versions to see if worth it

# StyleWriter

28

- ❖ Strengths:
  - grammar,
  - sentence structure,
  - excellent* Help/writing guide
- ❖ Word add-in

The screenshot displays the StyleWriter application window for a document titled "[HDDMMP Rev\_1 draft\_RFHT.docx]". The interface includes a menu bar (File, Edit, View, Analysis, Tools, Window, Help) and a toolbar with various icons. The main text area shows the word "personnel" with a definition: "personnel = employees, staff, people". A "Confused Words" section is active, showing a list of words and their definitions. A "Change in Air Quality" section provides a detailed analysis of the text, highlighting key aspects and activities that result in atmospheric emissions. A "Number of Sentences" chart shows the distribution of sentence lengths, with an "Average Length" of approximately 14.6 words. The status bar at the bottom provides summary statistics: Words: 194, Bog Index: 124 (Bad), Ave Sentence: 14.6 (Excellent), and Passive Index: 23 (Excellent).

StyleWriter - [HDDMMP Rev\_1 draft\_RFHT.docx]

File Edit View Analysis Tools Window Help

personnel **Confused Words** Technical report In-house Aus Resume

**personal** = one's own, private, done in person  
**personnel** = employees, staff, people

Edit Text

Change in Air Quality  
Key **aspects** and **activities** that will result in **atmospheric emissions**, which in turn can change local air **quality**, are:  
combustion of helicopter and vessel fuel during transport of **personnel** and offshore supplies  
**combustion** of fuel during general **operation** of HDD support **vessels** and marine **equipment** such as generators  
use of marine firefighting **systems**  
use of vessel refrigeration and **air conditioning systems**  
shipboard incineration.  
Fuel **combustion** results in **emissions** such as **nitrous oxides**, **sulfur oxides**, carbon **monoxides** and **particulates**. These emissions can lead to a decrease in local air quality and contribute to greenhouse gas emissions.  
Certain firefighting (e.g. **halon** deluge **systems**) and **refrigeration systems** in older model vessels could

Number of Sentences

Average Length

200  
150  
100  
50  
0

0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40 45 50 55+

Sentence Length (words)

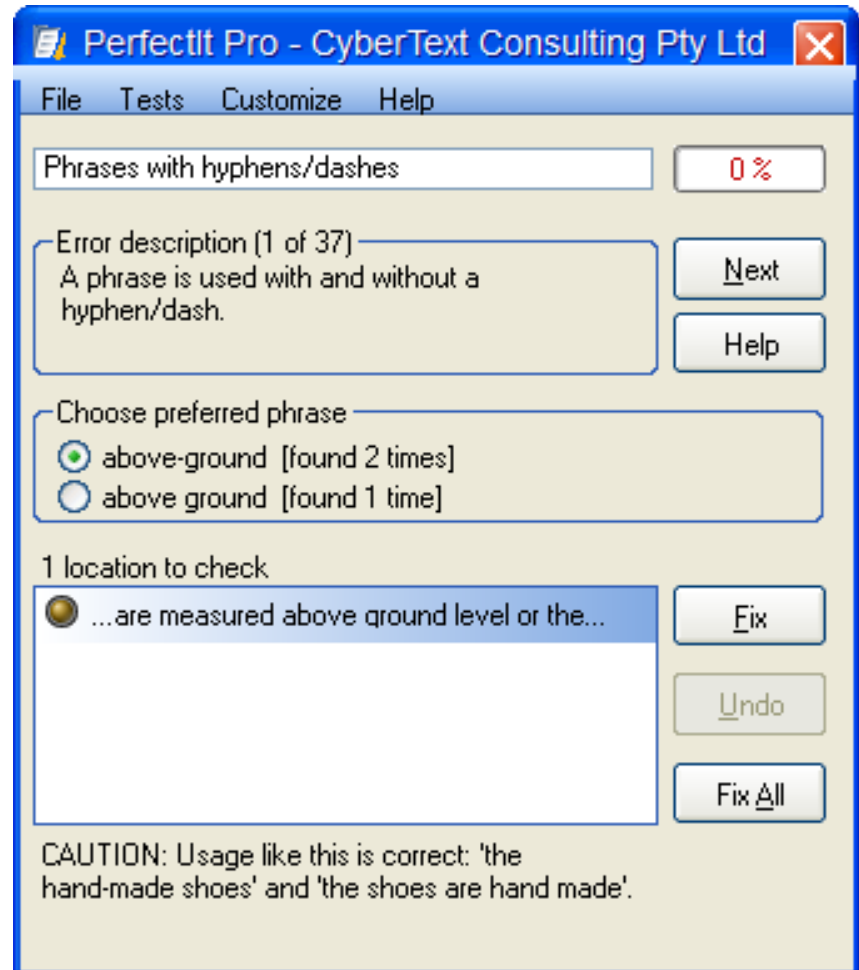
Words: 194 Bog Index: 124 **Bad** Ave Sentence: 14.6 **Excellent** Passive Index: 23 **Excellent**

From: <http://editorsoftware.com>; \$150

# PerfectIt

29

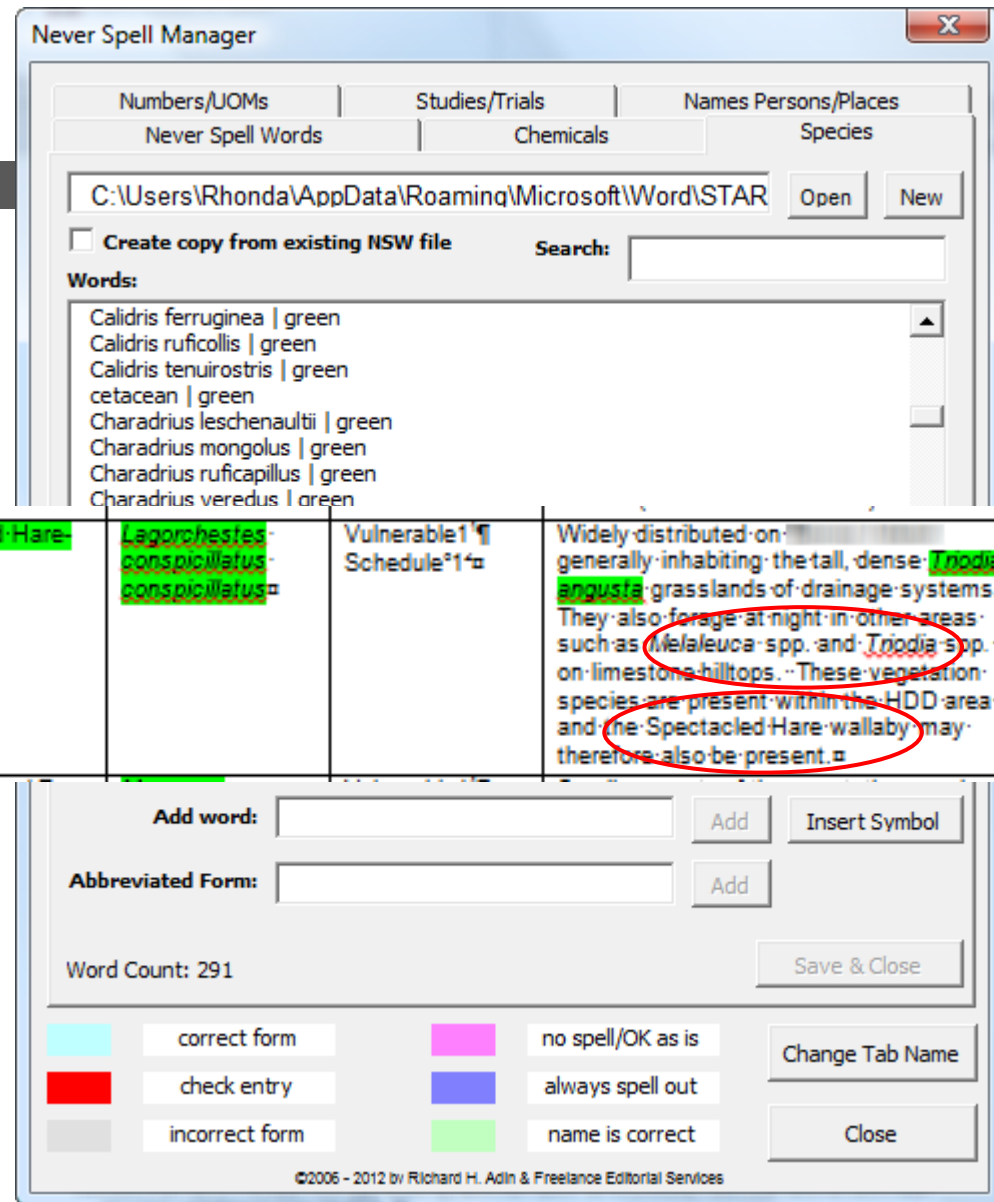
- ❖ Strengths: punctuation, abbrev. inconsistencies
- ❖ Word add-in
- ❖ From:  
<http://intelligentediting.com>; \$79 pro; free web option



# EditTools

30

- ❖ Strengths: time-saving macros; e.g. wildcard find/replace, custom lists of words to ignore
- ❖ Word add-in
- ❖ From: <http://wordsnsync.com>; \$69 pro



# AP StyleGuard

31

- ❖ Strengths: checks against AP Style
- ❖ Word add-in
- ❖ From:  
<http://www.apstylebook.com/?do=product&pid=style-guard>; from \$50 per user (annual subs)

# Other

32

- ❖ Spelling and grammar checkers
- ❖ Track Changes (Word)
- ❖ PDF comments/markup (Acrobat)
- ❖ Spellcheckers, link checkers, validators, for HTML (e.g. CSE HTML Validator)
- ❖ Style guides (general and specialist)
- ❖ Dictionaries, glossaries (general and specialist)



# “Don’t uninstall your brain”

33

"...tools can become **crutches** if they supplant rather than supplement human judgment. Spell-checking and grammar-checking programs ... and similar innovations to come will **never replace the writer’s own critical eye** (or an objective second opinion)...

...there is some evidence that using [tools] can **cause [your] editing skills to deteriorate**. Not only that, but less skilful writers can over rely on such tools, accept their sometimes flawed corrections without question, and otherwise ignore their shortcomings...

... By all means, buy [product] if it suits your needs. But don’t uninstall your brain."

(From: <http://www.dailywritingtips.com/ap-styleguard-and-the-death-of-editing/>)

# Helpful links

34

- ❖ Editing tips, techniques and checklists:  
[http://www.jeanweber.com/newsite/?page\\_id=5](http://www.jeanweber.com/newsite/?page_id=5)
- ❖ Working with a technical editor:  
<http://techwhirl.com/articles/working-with-a-technical-editor/>

# Thank you...then exercises

Any questions?

Contact me:

- ❖ [rhonda.bracey@cybertext.com.au](mailto:rhonda.bracey@cybertext.com.au)
- ❖ <http://www.cybertext.com.au>
- ❖ <http://cybertext.wordpress.com>