

NEW SOFTWARE DELIVERS ON-LINE EDITING

Word processing programs, spelling checkers, desktop publishing packages--these and other kinds of software have dramatically changed the way writers write. But only in the last year or so have microcomputer-based software tools emerged that are specific to editing and that enable the editor to work on the computer screen. Some of these tools are features contained within the latest and most sophisticated word processing programs; others are separate packages designed to be used with word processing programs. Many are useful to noneditors who review and comment on documents, as well as to editors. All can make the editor's job easier.

Editing on Paper vs. Editing on the Screen

In many ways traditional hard-copy editing has been an effective technique. Because most editing and proofreading symbols are intuitively grasped, willing authors can learn them (or at least a workable subset) without much difficulty. In addition, these symbols enable the author to view both the original and the editor's emendations at one glance. There is no potential confusion between the original and revised text, because the editor writes over and around the author's typescript.

But in the context of the computer revolution traditional editing has begun to seem inadequate, largely because it denies editors four major benefits that editors using computers can enjoy.

- First, professionals can work on-line together, even from remote sites, by transmitting text electronically; editors and authors who work on hard copy must use couriers or the mails.
- Second, most kinds of written material can be stored compactly using tapes or disks, whereas hard copy must be stored separately in file cabinets.
- Third, traditional hard-copy editors cannot use such labor-saving resources as spell-checking programs and search-and-replace functions, or, if they do, they must use them before they print out a file and start editing it in hard-copy form.
- Fourth, the traditional editor's changes, because they are entered manually, eventually must be keyboarded into the text file, a labor-intensive process that opens the door to new errors.

The potential benefits of working on the computer have led editors to look for ways to work on-line.

The Move to On-Line Editing

For several years certain on-line editing capabilities have been available on very large and expensive electronic publishing systems, but most on-line editing has been done with conventional hardware and software. Innovative editors have been using boldface, italics, underlining or strike-through to indicate insertions and deletions. Or they have used abbreviations such as

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"d" for delete and "i" for insert. They have added comments directly into the text in brackets, with upper-case characters, or through some other means. But these procedures are inefficient. Their continued use is likely to be restricted to sites where, for one reason or another, the new on-line editing tools are not applicable. Most editors now using these procedures will turn to the newly developed on-line editing tools, as will a great many editors who now work with pencils.

But not everyone is ready to convert. For one thing, working at a screen is more fatiguing and leads to typos. Visualizing lengthy documents on screen is harder, too, than working on paper, for two reasons: because most computer screens display fewer lines than a typical printed page, and because text-editing software doesn't provide the feel for a document's size and organization that paper does. Finally, current on-line editing tools don't work well with highly formatted text, equations, and graphics.

It seems fair to say, however, that these problems are becoming less serious. Computer screens are getting larger and considerably easier to read. Text-editing software is getting better at showing editors (and writers) where they are in a long document. Highly formatted text, equations, and graphics still present problems, but there are ways to deal with these elements in on-line editing. One is that the editor can copy a deficient list, graphic, or equation; fix it on the screen; and let the author simply compare the two versions.

A Case in Point: Red Pencil

In 1987 on-line editing is certainly a more attractive option, and we can expect still better tools as time goes on. A case in point is Red Pencil, one of the new computer tools that makes on-line editing feasible. It is the only microcomputer-based tool I know designed expressly for the editor, and it enables the editor to move into on-line editing easily and effectively.

The editor begins by importing text into Red Pencil from any IBM PC-compatible word processing program that can generate an ASCII file. Ideally, the computer will be equipped with a mouse. The editor examines the manuscript and selects any letter, word, phrase, or other unit of text and selects the menu entry that represents the kind of editing change desired. The editor can insert, delete, change, or move text; add or eliminate a paragraph break; restore something previously changed (the "stet" function); or add a query or comment. In the case of an insertion or a change, the editor types in the new text. In the case of a move, the editor selects the spot to which the block of text should be moved.

Then, with one more click of the mouse, an editing symbol, very much like one of the traditional symbols, appears over the text. The whole process takes just a bit more time than does working with a real pencil. But the extra seconds are amply repaid in the time saved by electronic transmission between editor and author.

The editor can then print out a copy of the marked text to show the author or can transmit the marked text via a local area network or modem. The author can restore the original text and can make new changes; the process continues until editor and author agree on a final version.

If Red Pencil did no more than this, it would still be a valuable tool. But its best feature is that it can execute all the editorial marks and produce a clean text without rekeying. Thus, with this software product editors are not simply eliminating barriers on the computer; they are using the power of the computer to achieve efficiencies that are impossible with hard-copy editing.

Red Pencil is available from Capsule Codeworks, 9024 132nd Pl. SE, Renton, WA 98056, (206) 235-7099.

Now that tools such as Red Pencil are available, more editors are likely to develop an interest in on-line editing. To nurture that interest, two other on-line editing programs will be featured in future issues of *The Eye*. One is a software package that manages reviewer comments on a manuscript; the other is a program for attaching editorial notes and comments to a manuscript without altering the manuscript itself.

--David K. Farkas

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BOOK REVIEWS

THE ACS STYLE GUIDE: A MANUAL FOR AUTHORS AND EDITORS, edited by Janet S. Dodd. Washington, DC: American Chemical Society, 1986. 264 pp., \$24.95 hardcover, \$14.95 paperback.

Although this style guide is primarily for authors and editors of books published by the American Chemical Society, it takes a more general approach than the ACS handbooks it supersedes. And its sales record--it is already into its second printing--indicates that many other writers and editors in scientific and technical fields are finding the book useful.

According to Janet Dodd, managing editor at the ACS Books Department, this is the only style guide available that lists chemical names and specifies when to italicize them and how to hyphenate them at the end of a line. (She is a chemist who has been at ACS for 10 years; some of her staff are chemists, some are not.)

But even if you're not into chemistry, there are a number of reasons why you may want to add this book to your shelf:

- It has an excellent section on when to use and how to prepare illustrations and tables--information that is not easy to find elsewhere. Its illustrations of appropriately drafted and labeled artwork are the best I've seen, and its several pages of typical problems with artwork (e.g., type or symbols too small or large for the other elements) are similarly instructive.
- It has some good, straightforward advice on writing style, aimed at scientists (e.g., "First person is perfectly acceptable where it helps keep your meaning clear: Jones reported *xyz*, but we found.... Our recent work demonstrated...")
- If you've been looking for an authority you can cite for splitting an infinitive, here it is:

Use split infinitives to avoid awkwardness or ambiguity.

Awkward

...to assist financially the student who is considering a career in chemistry

Better

...to financially assist the student who is considering a career in chemistry

(Dodd says ACS gets more complaints from authors about awkward editing of split infinitives--and straining to keep verb parts together--than about any other subjects.)