

Book Review

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Technical Editing: An Introduction to Editing in the Workplace

—Reviewed by

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Index Terms—*Copyediting, English grammar, proofreading, style.*

The authors of *Technical Editing* describe their primary audience as

...students who are preparing themselves for technical communication careers and therefore need to understand and gain experience in the practice of technical editing. (p. x)

The authors also acknowledge secondary audiences of practicing technical communicators, professionals “in any field” who wish to improve their writing and editing skills, and writers and managers who wish to understand the contributions of technical editors and manage projects that include technical editing.

After an opening chapter on the history of technical editing, Chapter 2 “Preparing for an Editing Project” presents analysis of the rhetorical situation—the document’s purpose, audience, and context. Chapter 3 “Planning and Implementing the Editing” addresses selecting the appropriate level of editing, and issues that focus on schedules and budgets.

Chapters 4–8 address editing for organization, navigation, completeness, accuracy, and style. Chapter 4 “Editing for Organization” provides common patterns of organization, and notably addresses that conflicting purposes may influence organization decisions.

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Chapter 5 “Editing for Navigation” addresses tactics for supporting users in navigating documents and finding information. The chapter addresses mechanisms for print navigation (tables of contents, lists of figures and tables, indexes), as well as navigation mechanisms for websites and other online formats. Online navigation aids discussed include navigation/menu bar design and placement, site maps, and navigational “breadcrumbs,” which show the reader’s context in the topic hierarchy of the website or other online content.

Chapter 6 “Editing for Completeness” and Chapter 7 “Editing for Accuracy” discuss (among other topics) how the audience’s prior knowledge influences whether a document is “complete” and “accurate,” as well as possible regulatory and safety considerations that may dictate document content.

Chapter 8 “Editing for Style” addresses editing for clarity and readability, presenting guidelines such as avoiding ambiguity, favoring active over passive voice, favoring positive over negative forms, minimizing nominalizations, and eliminating redundancies and clichés.

Chapter 9 “Editing Visuals” categorizes the types of graphs and other graphics used in text, their typical roles and use cases, and the way that graphics should accompany the text. Chapter 10 “Editing Page Design” presents design principles including alignment, repetition, and contrast, and also covers issues of typography.

Chapter 11 “Editing for Reuse” is particularly distinctive in its relevance to modern publishing workflows that are increasingly *topic-oriented*: in which writers create individual information topics, usually working with a semantic markup language,

and often in the context of a content management system. Authoring is agnostic of the way that topics will be collected and organized (the final “document”), and the final publishing format (print/PDF, desktop, smartphone). The authors provide informed overviews of content management systems, popular XML-based semantic markup languages (DITA, Lightweight DITA), and considerations for writing and editing content that will likely be published in multiple contexts, final formats, and assemblies of topics.

Chapters 12–17 specifically address copyediting for grammar and punctuation. Chapter 12 “Copyediting: Principles and Procedures” describes the copyeditors’ task and covers editing in both hardcopy and online formats, including procedures for using Microsoft Word’s online editing features.

The authors’ coverage of grammar in Chapters 13–17 is similar in depth and scope to that of many English grammar texts and resources, and is clearly presented in the context of the copyeditors’ task. All concepts are motivated with examples of both incorrect and correct usage.

Chapter 18 “Proofreading” addresses the scope of the proofreading task (particularly in contrast with the copyediting task) and addresses proofreading in both hardcopy and online contexts.

The book includes frequent sidebars that define key terms, provide commentary from practicing editors and writers, address historical context, explore ethical issues, or present possibly contrarian views.

For example, the sidebar “Do We Really Need to Teach Students to Edit Hardcopy Anymore?” argues the value of the skill and practice of editing documents in hardcopy form (p. 296).

Throughout the book, the authors address issues of modern technical communication workflows. They acknowledge that the dedicated editor role has become increasingly rare and that many technical writers are responsible for editing their own or their peers’ documents. They also address workplace considerations, including people, budgets, and schedules, in both planning and executing editing projects. Among their cautions:

Writers and project managers can get upset if you move beyond proofreading and begin to rewrite passages that have already passed muster with the copyeditor. (p. 475)

The book includes a thorough 30-page glossary of grammar terms, 33 pages of notes and references, and a thorough index.

Subtitled this 578-page book as an “introduction” may be a misnomer; the book is broad in scope and deep in coverage of its subject. It fills a need for current texts on the topic of technical editing and is grounded in modern technical communication workflows, practices, and approaches. This book is an invaluable teaching aid for classrooms and a welcome reference resource for practicing professionals.