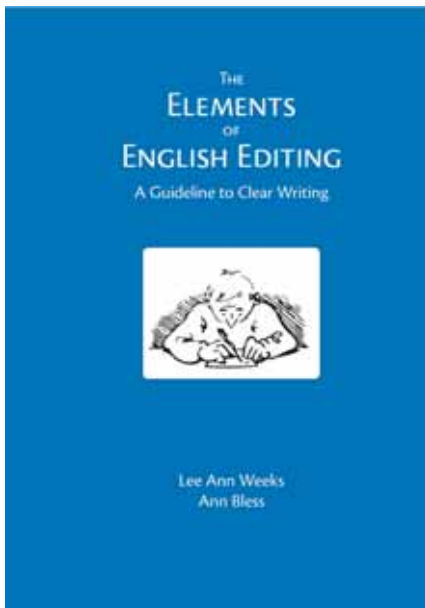


In the Bookstores



In *The Elements of English Editing: A Guideline to Clear Writing*, authors Lee Ann Weeks and Ann Bless have combined their 50 years of experience to create a concise, 71-page book which introduces readers to the language editing process. This book is divided into six chapters covering topics such as substantive editing, translational editing, copy editing, proof-reading and on-screen editing. It provides practical information to anyone entering or currently in the editorial profession, as well as a useful tool for medical writers and writers who translate text on a regular basis.

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the rationale behind the book, references various institutes, societies and other organisations approach to editing and outlines the authors' approach and what to expect from the subsequent chapters.

Comprising of 28 pages, chapter 2 forms the major part of this book and provides a general overview of substantive editing, whether it is at the text, paragraph, or sentence level. At the text level, the role of editor is to check for a main topic statement which has logic and cohesion followed by a concluding statement. The authors cover a range of common errors which require substantive editing. These include, but are not limited to, unfulfilled announcements and missing markers, where writers fail to discuss a topic that they claim they are going

The Elements of English Editing: A Guideline to Clear Writing

by Lee Ann Weeks and Ann Bless;

Scientific Editing Service, 2013.

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to; and insufficient differentiation of unfamiliar information, where writers mistakenly assume the reader is familiar with information that is not yet been introduced. It also highlights the muddled use of singular and plural, mixed use of positive and negative statements, inconsistent terminology, insufficient repetition, and unclear pronouns, all of which can contribute to cumbersome and ambiguous reading.

Substantive editing at the paragraph level ensures that each paragraph presents a single cohesive idea. The authors highlight errors that writers are particular prone to, including incorrect distinction of paragraphs, not defining the topic of the paragraph in the first line, misuse of transitional statements to improve the flow between multiple points within a single paragraph, and incorrect ordering of information within the paragraph. Lastly, the authors explain how the use of parallel terminology, where writers use different words to describe the same thing within a single paragraph, increases the complexity of the text and can affect its readability.

Substantive editing at the sentence level is similar to editing at the paragraph level. Here, the editor checks for a multitude of features including incorrect use of pronouns, incorrect ordering of information, correct presentation of parallel ideas, inappropriate use of connective words, empty wording, passive wording and ambiguity in the text, to name but a few. In the final section of this chapter the authors discuss each feature of editing at the paragraph level and provide practical advice to ensure the flow of the text is logical, coherent, and unambiguous.

Overall this chapter is well-structured and informative; throughout the chapter the authors provide relevant examples of problematic text which requires revision. These examples are described in a logical

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step-by-step way; the authors provide an example text, indicate the problem, and provide a solution to the problem followed by a revised text. A valuable feature of this chapter is that the advice given is broad and not limited to a single document type. Thus, the problems covered have implications for regulatory and medical communication documents.

Chapter 3 looks at editing text which has been translated, in particular the need to ensure that sentences are accurate and complete and that the correct wording is used. The chapter concludes with four helpful approaches to revising translated text: 1) setting the document aside before self-editing, 2) checking the translated text against the source, 3) having someone else check the translated text against the source, and 4) having someone else edit. For writers whose first language is not English, or who regularly translate text, reading this chapter is particularly worthwhile.

Chapter 4 discusses the need for copy editing and the distinction between copy editing and proof-reading. The authors define copy editing as the process by which the text is checked for accuracy and consistency but also whether the text layout conforms to specific guidelines. In particular, it relates to the visual characteristics of the text and includes reviewing headings, bullet points, spelling, punctuation, parentheses, references, figures, tables and appendices. This chapter discusses each characteristic and highlights some basic writer errors with more examples of problematic text and suggested revisions.

Chapter 5 discusses the role of the proof-reader in reviewing documents. The proof-reader reviews the final version of the text, which can either be compared against a preceding version or without reference to the previous version and as such is a "blind" review of the document. The proof-reader

provides an essential role in highlighting formatting error, inconsistencies, omissions or typos that may have arisen after multiple editorial review stages and typically uses a set of symbols to denote changes; which are presented in this chapter. It also provides information on how to effectively edit a document “on-screen” using track changes and comments, as well as the benefit of using macros and comment codes.

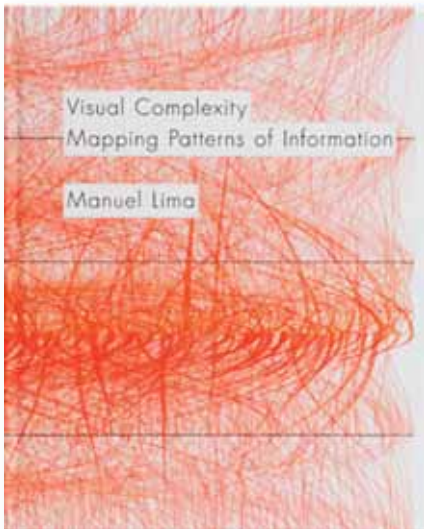
This book concludes with some final remarks in chapter 6, a reference section,

and a useful editor’s checklist consisting of 30 key points an editor needs to check at the text, paragraph and sentence levels.

Other reviewers have complimented this book on its practicality and I would echo that sentiment. From a writer’s perspective, it is a useful guide to prevent unnecessary last-minute editing of documents. Admittedly, many of the topics covered are basic and are by no means dealt with comprehensively. Thus, a seasoned medical writer may consider the content second

nature. However, at €10.50, it does offer value for money as a useful reference book. You may not find this book in bookstores, but you can get it from the following websites: www.sciencewriting.nl/book/ and www.annbless.com.

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Making a pool of knowledge available to lay audiences can be challenging and often invites the following question: How is information understood, processed, and presented? Manuel Lima, the New York-based founder of the network visualisation platform visualcomplexity.com, investigates this question in his book *Visual Complexity: Mapping Patterns of Information*. *Visual Complexity* provides a collection of essays and 100 examples of information visualisation from the field’s leading professionals. It becomes obvious that information visualisation has evolved in recent years and now goes far beyond the standard line charts, pie charts, and box plots that many of us routinely produce.

Manuel Lima’s aim with this book was to decode trends and technologies of data representation so that readers can understand and appreciate this fast evolving field, which emerged with the rise of the information age. Since we now have to represent considerably more data than

Visual Complexity: Mapping Patterns of Information

by Manuel Lima

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before, the aim of data visualisation has changed from simple data presentation to the representation of multi-dimensional relationships. Computer scientists, artists, and writers often work hand in hand to find ways to represent relationships between more dimensions of data than is possible with two-dimensional displays such as bar charts and scatter plots.

Although Lima shows that the standard graphical language, which consists of points, lines, and curves, can be found in novel information visualisation techniques, he also points out that aesthetics and contemporary design features have in recent years become a major aspect of data visualisation. To illustrate this, he highlights 15 basic types of network diagrams, ranging from arc diagrams to flow charts and spheres. While Lima explores how different strategies to map information work, he does not provide insights into new visualisation techniques. For those interested in actual visualisation techniques, *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information* by Edward Tufte provides sophisticated guidance on this topic.

Visual Complexity focuses on the beautification of big data through an innovative mix of art and design. Lima argues that information visualisation has become the modern language of data representation in the twenty-first century. Whereas data visualisation is widely used as a tool to present data, Lima suggests using visualisation techniques in order to

understand big data. In this way, visual representations can facilitate the perception of patterns, connections, and structures.

Interestingly, *Visual Complexity* reveals that besides aiming for efficiency and clarity, information visualisation designers aim to communicate their ideas about data, making statements and evoking particular emotions in the viewer.

Whereas this is clearly a no-go for regulatory writing, it might be an interesting consideration for communication with lay audiences. Actually, as a medical writer, you might already have been using the new graphical visualisation language without knowing it. Think about it: An integral part of medical communication is the visualisation of complex data through (flow) charts, pictograms, and infographics. Communication with lay audiences is often facilitated by visual aids and representation of large data sets through multi-dimensional visualisations should clearly be considered for this purpose.

As Lev Manovich, author of the book *The Language of New Media*, sums it up in the foreword to *Visual Complexity*: ‘We seek to represent, in order to understand.’

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