

Surrender to science

André Snyders

Throw away your fusty grammar books and your style manuals. Toss your well-thumbed copy of Fowler in the recycling bin and move on. Move forward. Leave the past behind and surrender to science. The current of progress and innovation is too strong for you to resist; let the scientific method take you forward.

Editors have been among the last to make peace with the precise machinery of science but we are constantly reminded that we must do so or be left behind. Genomes have been decoded and atoms have been split while copy editors continue to plod along: interpreting and correcting using just their memory, a sharp blue pencil and a few dusty reference books. We made the move to editing on a screen but we cling to other apparently shameful, outdated methods that involve quirky personal choices, quaint phrases, moral intuition and traditional ideas that some things are sacred.

Science has conquered all. Religion, philosophy and art all lie quietly until called upon to serve. Science uses giant databases, processors and nifty mathematical formulae to solve problems, a million at a time. It can store a thousand dictionaries on a chip smaller than the head of a pin and search a thesaurus for a given set of characters in less time than it takes us to sign an invoice. Science needs no sleep and does not stop for quick cups of tea or a sip of bourbon. It finds problems and solves them through sheer precision and massive computing power. Who are we to stand against this?

Well, stand against it we must. Science should be our helper, not our master or our guide. Massive databases, like puffing steam trains, are only useful when they have a driver who knows where she's going and how to blow the whistle when she gets there. Religion, art and philosophy should be right up front with the driver, not relegated to the caboose. To edit is to choose, and we must first make sure of our ability to be good choosers.

Scientific methods have made some welcome inroads into editing. They bring clear benefits, especially when they augment our skills rather than bypass them. A Google search is often used as a very crude judge of

which variant of a word is used more often. For those who have access to them, the ability to search a specific language corpus is much more useful, especially if an editor needs to save time when working in a new field. Microsoft Word offers a 'search and replace' function that few of us could do without, and it also offers a range of readability statistics: Flesch Reading Ease, Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level. In just a few seconds, MS Word has the ability to point out passive sentences and some grammatical mistakes in a document that would take most of us a whole day to read. As most editors have already found, these are useful but they can also be clumsy and misleading unless you know what you're looking for. Some readability calculators also offer scores on the Coleman-Liau index, the Gunning fog index and the SMOG index. Take your pick of these scientific marvels but don't expect too much of them.

The development and refining of language use and style is a messy and uneven process but it is also one of our greatest treasures. Our languages have learned to accommodate birth, death and love alongside less emotive concepts like latitude, longitude and kilopascals. We have learned to deal with small changes in

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fundamental meanings and we do our best to adapt to big new ideas and new basic units. Speaking of basic units, a newspaper reported last month on some scientific trouble with the metric system: *Forty feet underground, secured in a temperature- and humidity- controlled vault, here lies Kilogram No. 20 ... the perfect embodiment of the kilogram – almost perfect. In the more than a century since No. 20 and dozens of other exact copies were crafted in France to serve as the world's standards of the kilogram, their masses have been mysteriously drifting apart. In essence, no one really knows today what a kilogram is. "The real problem is people in other areas of science don't want to measure, say, fundamental constants with respect to this artifact made in the 19th century," said Richard Davis, head of the mass section at the International Bureau of Weights and Measures in France.*

The scientists appear to have lost control of one of their basic units: the kilogram. If anything, science has something to learn from language and the haphazard triumphs of the editing profession.

About the author: *André Snyders works as a research editor at an investment bank in Sandton. He is also the editor of PEGboard.*

The Editor's Inkspot



I came across a wonderful etching by Francisco de Goya that brought to mind the importance of an editor in the publishing process. The print is called *El sueño de la razón produce monstruos* (The Sleep of Reason produces Monsters) and it imagines the 'monsters' that appear when we turn away from rational argument. An editor's role is often to be vigilant and observant, and to remain reasonable at all times. You can view the original etching on most art Websites. Just for fun, I asked a friend to amend the picture to make the sleeper look even more like a modern editor than in the original (see page 3). If you're a freelance editor, those monsters in the background might remind you of the creditors coming to claim some of your hard-earned cash, or even the deadlines that creep up unnoticed.

I enjoyed having lunch with Tiffany Markman and writing the PEG profile of her in this issue. Ms Markman is young and energetic and full of ideas, so it's no surprise that her business is doing well. She's an editor but her business plan includes all the other jobs that complement her editing work.

Kirsten Whitworth has now joined the PEGboard team and I trust PEGgers will find her advice on directory entries useful. I have also invited a few editors to send us short diary columns so that we can share in their editorial sorrows and triumphs.

English words have to work hard if they want to survive for long, and many words are discarded or adapted as we move from century to century. Most English speakers today would struggle to understand the original Beowulf, for example, because we have moved so far from the words and even the characters used at the time. But not all languages are in such a rush, it seems. I recently read *The Kite Runner* and was particularly interested in the epic book that Amir and Hassan read together: the Shahnameh. It is a poetic opus written by the Persian poet Ferdowsi around 1000 BC and is an epic of the Persian-speaking world. Apparently, despite being more than a thousand years old, it is still read in its original form (according to Wikipedia). I gather Persian has developed over the years but the words used in this particular epic seem to be real survivors; good for them.

PEGboard

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Meetings in Gauteng are generally held on the last Saturday of January, April, July and October, unless they coincide with a holiday. Meetings in CT are held on ad hoc dates.

PEGgers at Bookjol

Gauteng members represented PEG at the Bookjol, part of the University of Pretoria's centenary year celebrations, from 4 to 8 March. The Bookjol presented an opportunity for PEG to showcase its services and members to publishers, academic staff, students, prospective editors, and writers. The event was also a warm-up exercise for the Cape Town International Book Fair in July.

The PEG stand was staffed by Caroline de Gersigny, Jill Fresen, Marié Henning, Derrick Hurlin, Ann Pipe, Linda Pretorius, Daphne Stokoe and Audrey Williams. John Linnegar, chair of the PEG marketing subcommittee, sent posters and PEG marketing materials, together with members' pamphlets and business cards, from Cape Town. At the Pretoria end, Linda Pretorius transformed metres of bottle-green fabric into two corporate tablecloths and Hester van der Walt coordinated the logistics.

There were a number of events during the Bookjol, such as readings by authors, a puppet theatre, music performances and visits by school groups. The exhibitors included SWETS Information Services, the University

of Pretoria Library Services, Media 24, Pretoria University Law Press (PULP), Woordboek van die Afrikaanse Taal, Wiley-Blackwell, Blackwell Book Services South Africa, South African Library for the Blind, Fascination Books, Vivlia, Lapa, Unisa Press, Van Schaik and Protea Boekhuis.

PEG's green-wrapped sweets were very popular with visitors and fellow exhibitors. Once they were munching, they were often a captive audience for an editors-in-a-nutshell lecture about PEG services. Attendance numbers were unfortunately not very high – the exhibition seemed to be 'hidden' to some extent in the Rautenbach Hall below the Aula.

Most of the stand team members nevertheless felt PEG's participation was worthwhile. Many visitors to the stand had no idea of the existence of PEG, let alone its services. Individual team members said they had made useful contacts for future work.

Article by Hester van der Walt. *Hester is a freelance editor and translator. She is also a member of the PEG marketing subcommittee.*



Picture: Jason Wells

Profile: Tiffany Markman

While doing some research on editing in South Africa, I came across Tiffany Markman's Website. The PEG Website will be great some day but Ms Markman's site is already a model for editors and copywriters who are keen to develop a serious web presence. Tiffany and I agreed to meet for lunch so that I could learn a bit more about her business and her approach to editing for this PEGboard profile.

Tiffany suggested the creamy pesto and I agreed. I'm sure clients do the same: Tiffany suggests, clients agree. And then the clients go back for more. The secret, it seems, is to offer them enough to keep them interested. Your editing menu needs to offer more than grammar and proofreading, and the menu on Tiffany's site is extensive. Tiffany already runs the sort of business that many up-and-coming editors aspire to. After listening to Tiffany explain her approach, I was even tempted to chuck in my job at the bank and have a go at being a freelancer. As it turns out, if the banking sector's losses continue for much longer, I might have to do just that.

Tiffany studied politics and journalism and completed her honours degree in 2003. She moved into freelancing after a few years with a small school-book publisher. Tiffany has worked as a freelance editor/copywriter for nine years but this is her fourth year as a full-time entrepreneur.

'Self-esteem is vital for success'

Many editors are genial, self-deprecating types who seldom have a good word to say about themselves. This attitude can be endearing but it seldom survives outside academia and other protected, non-commercial environments. Self-esteem, Tiffany explains, is a vital requirement for editors who want to succeed commercially. The hurly-burly of the free market is no place for shrinking violets; editors need to speak up for themselves and not sell themselves short. Tiffany makes it clear to her clients that editing skills are a valuable commodity and does an admirable job on her Website of making the case for polished, precise copy. Following Tiffany's approach means you should avoid thinking of yourself as a 'mere editor'; you must become a person with a will and an invoice book, and be ready to train, to write, to rewrite and, of course, to bill.

Cross-selling is another tip that Tiffany suggested. Once she has edited copy for a client, Tiffany is also in a position to offer other services; her Website lists print and Web copywriting, proposal writing, newsletters, workshops and seminars. Offering all these other services means that Tiffany sometimes starts off editing the newsletter and then moves on to the Website, and

eventually on to training. Along the way, she builds a relationship with the client and makes the most of her reading and writing skills. Some PEG members are more likely to cross-sell marmalade with their editing. As tasty as that sounds, it won't pay the bills for long.

'The basic rules must be respected if we are to be understood and be effective in our business goals'

Tiffany mentioned her work with Exxaro, a leading mining company, as an example of how editors can use cross-selling to keep their clients happy and their billable hours in the double digits. Tiffany was involved in the rebranding process when Kumba split its assets into Kumba Resources and Exxaro. After working with HKLM, an external agency, Tiffany also happened to meet some Exxaro people at a conference, who then invited her to do a training course. The course was such a success that she returned to complete the company's style guide.

Tiffany works from a home office and uses a laptop, which means Eskom's power-cuts don't interrupt her too much. She enjoys and appreciates the advisory aspects of PEG, especially the ideas and advice on practical things like finding accountants who have the right skills to deal with freelancers. Tiffany offers her regular clients a volume discount on large jobs and is prepared to offer small businesses a lower rate.

'Your editing menu needs to offer more than grammar and proofreading'

I was pleased to learn that Tiffany is quite pro-Truss (that would be Lynne Truss, the author of *Eats, Shoots, and Leaves*) and is keen to see the rules of English usage understood and adhered to. Rules matter, she says, and cannot be ignored for cosmetic reasons. English is a 'frisky puppy', Tiffany explains, but the flexibility of English usage does have its limits – the basic rules must be respected if we are to be understood and be effective in our business goals.

Our lunch ended on a very positive note. Tiffany estimates that the market for editors is growing quite fast and could probably accommodate 10 more businesses like hers. Tiffany sometimes has to turn work away but she still deals with a wide range of clients: a large number of corporates, some government work, a few small businesses and the occasional NGO.

Article by PEGboard editor, André Snyders

Diary of an editor: Part One

A Vista without a view, a bleak Outlook – and i(nearly)Burst

5 February 2008

08h00 – I switch on my new 24” screen Hewlett Packard, complete with Windows Vista and iBurst, and go straight to MS Word, where Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 of someone’s bright future stand ready to be demolished and rebuilt – if Chapter One was anything to go by ... How delightful to be able to sit quietly in my own house, at my own computer, concentrating without interruption – on two pages at once! Birds twitter outside the back door and the morning is cool and fresh.

But I am in la-la land, unaware of a conspiracy brewing against my innocent attempt make an honest living by rearranging other people’s cryptic ramblings.

09h00 – A warm feeling of fast, steady achievement surrounds me like a cocoon, when suddenly the screen goes dead. I just sit, hoping it will all go away (or rather, come back). Twenty minutes later I am told to reconnect. I discover nothing is saved. Previous PEG forum lamentations against Vista, now fully understood, course through my head. Vista is a misnomer.

10h00 – I start again, after checking that Word is set to save every five minutes. I work fast, but in a state of unrelenting trepidation. My mood is not improved by the linguistic lapses of the perpetrator of Chapter Two, who is so caught up in his story that he forgets he is writing a dissertation ... ‘And now I climb over the wall and I am running after the suspect until I catch him.’ Pity for this rather sweet-natured and dedicated student allows me to change the sentence to ‘The researcher pursued the suspect until he apprehended him.’ Finally Chapter Two goes forth via Outlook – my first e-mail from my PC. I press ‘Send’ with triumph.

22h00 – Three more triumphs have followed the first one. I have met the deadline.

6 February 2008 – my birthday. Surely only good things can happen today?

09h00 – I switch on the PC. The lone communication in my inbox is one of hysteria from the student, asking why I have sent back his work without any corrections.

12h00 – After my husband’s hands-on help – the procedures of which I do not grasp – the Word documents are checked, found to be edited, and re-sent.

This time they do not arrive.

15h00 – I have pacified the student – who has intimated that were his dissertation to arrive late, his re-registration fees would be paid by someone other than himself. I have also located his supervisor, who has reluctantly agreed to inform the examiners that the delay is

due to failure of (the latest and most expensive – my words) technology.

18h00 – The student phones to say that the e-mails have arrived, the corrections are apparent, and the examiners have, according to the supervisor, agreed to wait another three days.

19h00 – I am too fragmented to count pages and send an invoice. We order chicken burgers and chips. The family drinks champagne – I take refuge in boeogoe brandy on ice.

Article by Marlette van der Merwe. Marlette is a personal librarian at a distance learning university in Pretoria.

MEETING REPORTBACK

Non-fiction is tops

Peter Stiff is a well-known author as well as a publisher, and the boardroom at Heinemann’s was packed to capacity on 10 May as eager PEGgers met to hear it from both sides. Peter regaled us with the story of his start as a writer and how this led in time to the establishment of his company, Galago Publishing. The company has been in existence since 1980 and concentrates exclusively on non-fiction titles with a South African interest and in the political and environmental fields.



Meetings coordinator Isabelle Delvare introduces Peter Stiff

Galago now publishes six to eight titles a year. Peter’s decision to restrict his list to non-fiction is based on the fact that around 80% of all books sold are in fact non-fiction. There are in his view not enough authors who write about what they know, and so he expects his editors to check facts as well as language – an editor’s background and fields of expertise are thus important.

Asked whether he thinks print-on-demand is going to change the face of publishing, he said no, because the quality is not quite the same and only large print runs will guarantee quality. Where technology does affect the industry is in customers: some buy exclusively on line, while others like to feel the book before they buy.

Pioneers and paragons

André Snyders

Under whose gaze does a paragraph wriggle itself into shape? Which famous editor could have spotted an incorrect modifier at a thousand paces? And which genius among us can charm the most timid little phrase into revealing the secret of its true meaning? Almost all professions and sports have recognised and honoured their leading talents but our pantheon is empty. A few names are passed on to new generations of editors but that is usually because their wisdom has been preserved in a book. Young inexperienced editors would do well to study the paragons of their profession, in the same way that young cricketers watch Sachin Tendulkar and young mathematicians learn about Carl Friedrich Gauss. We look up to these people because of the excellence they represent, and we strive to learn from them even if our talent might never approach theirs.

PEG profiles and book launches offer us a glimpse of some of the talented folk among us but we seldom see the work they do. We might know their names and even chat to them but we seldom admire their editing work the way we can admire Donald Bradman's hook shots that soared over the boundary for six at a cricket match. Perhaps editing is such a solitary, confined profession that we should not aspire to any of this. Perhaps our heroes and heroines will remain known only to their clients and to those with whom they share their private triumphs.

People who have written books on language and editing are probably the best known: Strunk and White, Fowler, Butcher, and Hart of Hart's Rules. It seems perverse that editors, whose job is to improve others' books, only become famous when they stop editing and start writing.

The most famous editing job I can think of is Ezra Pound's work (in 1922) on TS Eliot's poem 'The Waste Land'. Pound's edits can still be seen and appreciated (or not) by people interested in the editing process. Drafts of the poem show that almost half the material was cut before a final version was published. The famous opening lines of the poem (April is the cruellest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land, ...) were originally at the top of the second page of the typescript.

South Africa probably has an editing tradition to be proud of, although I admit I have never come across any article or book on this topic. It seems right that we should honour great talents of the past (and the present) and I'd be interested to hear from PEG members on this topic. I would like to recommend two South Africans who appear to me to have done pioneering language work in South Africa: Professor Siphon Nyembezi and Joel Alswang. But before we

discuss their work (see box below), let's look at some other names from beyond our own borders.

The American Copy Editors Society's (ACES) annual prize is named for Pam Robinson, news editor of the Los Angeles Times–Washington Post News Service in suburban New York. Robinson was a co-founder of ACES in 1997 and the society's first president. One of her goals was to make copy editors more visible and to encourage them to take on a more constructive role.

Blake Morrison wrote a very useful article ('Black day for the blue pencil') in the *Observer* about how editors are now an endangered species. I would recommend this article to any editor; it can be found on *The Guardian's* Website. In the article, Morrison mentions Maxwell Perkins (editor at Scribner), Diana Athill (author of *Stet*), Jennie Erdal (author of *Ghosting*) and Tom Maschler, a publisher at Cape. Edward Garnett, who edited DH Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, is also mentioned. Bill Buford edited the magazine *Granta* and was sometimes accused of being 'overbearingly interventionist'. William Maxwell (Frank O'Connor's editor) is mentioned as being like 'a good teacher who does not say "Imitate me" but "This is what I think you are trying to say".'

Morrison argues that 'Three major works of early 20th-century literature – *Sons and Lovers*, *The Waste Land* and *The Great Gatsby* – were transformed by the interventions of others.' Maxwell Perkins edited F Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* as well as two previous novels. As Morrison explains, 'Neither Perkins nor Fitzgerald was good at spelling: after *This Side of Paradise* was published, spotting the typos – there were more than 100 – became a parlour game in New York book circles (without his secretary, who saved him time and again, Perkins might have become infamous as The Editor Who Couldn't Spell).'

Alswang and Nyembezi

Joel Alswang compiled the English Usage Dictionary for South African Schools (with A van Rensburg) and was an inspector and a superintendent of education in the Transvaal for many years. Alswang is the author of a book on sporting terminology and, more recently, a book on computer terminology for the layman. He was also the founder and principal of Bryanston Primary School and, eventually, of Bryanston High School in Johannesburg. He is a consultant to the English Academy and lives in the Johannesburg suburb of Highlands North.

The proper use of numbers

Copy editors spend so much time checking the words in the text that we might be inclined to neglect or overlook the numbers. Some material relies on the numbers to tell the story so it is best to have a clear understanding of how to express the numbers, how to compare them, and how to show changes in the numbers. A writer explaining an election result, for example, will need to keep track of percentages, percentage points, majorities, large proportions and comparative increases. This is by no means easy and probably explains why most of just want to know who won without having to wade through the detailed explanation.

If a writer cannot keep track of what his numbers are meant to be showing, the reader will get muddled and lost. Texts on statistics, finance and science are not the only areas that require the careful use of numbers; recipe books, history books and geography texts also need to present their numbers and units carefully and clearly.

Here's a good example of someone using numbers well, even though we might disagree with some of their style choices:

The printed word has paid a price – from 1981 to 2003, the leisure reading of 15- to 17-year-olds fell to seven minutes a day from 18. But the real action has been in multitasking. By 2003, children were cramming an average of 8½ hours of media consumption a day into just 6½ hours – watching TV while surfing the Web, reading while listening to music, composing text messages while watching a movie.

(David Robinson, in the *Wall Street Journal*, 13 May 2008)

The *Oxford Style Manual* devotes the whole of chapter seven to numbers. The basic principles explain ranging and non-ranging figures and when to use figures or words. As always, 'clarity for the reader is always more important than blind adherence to rule'.

Sibusiso Nyembezi is known as a Zulu novelist, poet, scholar, teacher and editor. He edited the compact Zulu dictionary and books on how to learn Zulu. Nyembezi's novels are widely read and he is also known for his poetry, writing on Zulu folklore and his translation of Alan Paton's *Cry, The Beloved Country*. He lectured at Wits from 1948 to 1953, teaching Zulu and Xhosa, and in 1955 was appointed to lecture at Fort Hare, remaining until 1959, when he resigned in protest against the government's restrictive new policies. Out of work for a period, Nyembezi took an editorial job with the publishers Shuter and Shooter in Pietermaritzburg, where he stayed until he retired.

The *Oxford Style Manual* suggests using words for indefinite or colloquial amounts, as in *talking twenty to the dozen; I have said so a hundred times; one in a million; with God a thousand years are but as one day*.

For a span of numbers, OSM recommends using an en rule (–) and eliding to the fewest number of figures possible (Butcher offers the same advice; see more on this below). Elision is the process of joining or merging things, and the tricky part is deciding what to leave out, of course.

A common mistake is the use of an apostrophe to make a number plural. No apostrophe is needed. This applies to words and figures: 1960s, temperature in the 20s, in the Nineties.

Plural phrases take plural verbs where the elements enumerated are considered severally:

- Ten miles of path are being repaved.
- Twenty people are in the lift.

Plural numbers considered as single units take singular verbs:

- Ten miles of path is a lot to repave.
- The lift's maximum capacity is twenty.

Butcher's Copy Editing offers advice on numbers in a quite few sections. The 'House Style' chapter has sections on Measurements, Money and Numbers. Butcher notes that to some typesetters 'numeral' means a roman numeral; they use 'figure' to mean an Arabic numeral. To avoid any misunderstanding, don't use numeral on its own when referring to a number to be set in Arabic.

Apparently, authors of general books usually include a comma to indicate thousands in numbers with four or more digits, whereas science and mathematics books usually omit the comma in thousands.

Butcher deals with elision particularly well. Measurements such as length, temperature, wavelength and latitude should not be elided because it is possible to use a descending scale as well as an ascending one: 21–2 might mean 21 to 22 or 21 to 2. As always, follow a consistent approach and avoid ambiguity. Page numbers are much easier to elide, though there are differences between British and American usage: The British elide as far as possible (21–9, 131–4, 234–45), except for 11–19 in each hundred, which retain the 'tens' digit (211–15). Some publishers prefer to repeat the 'tens' if the first number ends in zero: 130–35, for example. In the USA elision is often to the last two digits, unless the tens digit is a zero: 65–68, 351–63, 1123–48, but 100–106 and 103–7.

Your PEG directory entry

The compilation of the PEG Directory is an annual process that is in line with the move towards increased professionalism. We ought to be thinking about what the directory says about the group because potential clients often have only the PEG directory to guide them. Bearing this in mind, it is useful to know what information would best help these clients to find the right person for the job. The inclusion of a note to the client and the code of conduct convey the professionalism required of an organisation such as PEG.

When it comes to individual directory entries, many PEG members seem to err on the side of brevity and modesty. The directory is probably not the place to do this. This is where you want your skills and experience to be on display to the person paging or scrolling through it.

Directory entries must be specific. A potential client often has very little time to devote to finding the right person with the right skills. The faster they can find the right information, the better. It is in everyone's best interests that they are approached by people who do in fact require their particular skills. Many of us are familiar with having to redirect queries from people who think they understand what our specialist skills are to other members. Time wasted on this often frustrating exercise can be put to far better use.

Currently, the PEG directory lists members' qualifications, experience, skills and specialist subjects, along with standard contact information. An examination of directories of other editors' associations around the world has revealed some possibly useful approaches to our entries for the 2009 directory. The Association of Freelance Editors, Proofreaders and Indexers in Ireland has a detailed online directory, separating experience from examples of work. This gives members an opportunity to cite examples of their work in some detail, and gives clients an opportunity to see a sample of the work.

The Editors' Association of Canada directory provides even more detail than its Irish counterpart. Members list the media or genres in which they work, as well as the subjects in which they specialise. They list their 'other interests', which gives members space to identify other subject areas about which they may be knowledgeable even without a particular qualification. There is space for a statement by each member, where members are able to sell themselves and their skills, explain any unique attributes, or specify that they do not work on theses, despite doing academic editing work. They could also list equipment that is not covered by the general statement included in the introductory pages of the directory. Both of these categories would be useful for PEG members.

One suggestion to consider is that a table of members and their skills could be included in the directory, thus providing, at a glance, a comprehensive guide to the various services on offer. Members could be grouped geographically in the list, as in the body of the directory (although, in the electronic media age, is this strictly necessary?) and the services that are on offer be indicated by marks in the appropriate columns. This format is used very successfully in the SA Conference Directory, for example.

The PEG Directory is a tool for members to sell their skills to clients, and with the right approach, could become a marketing tool in itself.

Article by PEGboard team member Kirsten Whitworth.

Editing banned

The New York Times reports on the end of a peculiar provision in one state's constitution: Governors in Wisconsin have long been allowed to sign off on budget bills but do some tricky erasing first. They could delete words, numbers, sentences, paragraphs or some combination of all of those, to create entirely new meanings never intended by the original authors.

A governor scratched out some 700 words from a section of the 2005 budget bill, leaving behind just 20 words that, when stitched back together, moved US\$427 million from the transportation fund to education. But voters put an end to some of the governor's fancy editing power and have barred the governor from creating 'a new sentence by combining parts of two or more sentences'. Until 1990, Wisconsin governors could actually 'cross out letters inside words to make whole new words'. (Note: Parts of this piece are taken from *The Wall Street Journal's* Best of the Web.)

New members

Welcome to our new members:

Sthabile Akpan (Johannesburg)
 Marita Botha (Johannesburg)
 Lynne Conchar (Stellenbosch)
 Isolde Dittrich (Johannesburg)
 Rinelle Evans (Pretoria)
 Carola Koblitz (Cape Town)
 Fiona McCutcheon (Cape Town)
 Monica Seeber (Johannesburg)
 Elsa Semmelink (Johannesburg)
 Venon Siebert (Cape Town)
 Sarren Small (Johannesburg)
 Daniel Steyn (Cape Town)
 Yzette Terreblanche (Highveld)
 Irene van Maarseveen (Pretoria)
 Fiona Jean Wallace (Johannesburg)