
Book Reviews

Effective Onscreen Editing: New Tools for an Old Profession. Geoff Hart. Diaskeuasis Publishing, Quebec, 2008. 743p. US\$20.00. ISBN 978-0-9783227-0-0.



The title of Geoff Hart's excellent e-book is misleading: *Effective Onscreen Editing: New Tools for an Old Profession*. A better title might be *Everything I Know About Editing*. This is simultaneously the book's

strength and its weakness.

First, true to its title, the book explores in depth the tools available in word processors, for both Windows and Macintosh, and relates the vast functionality to onscreen editing.

Second, it covers many aspects of building and running an editing business, such as negotiating contracts, defining the level of editing, communicating with clients, and setting up a secure electronic working environment. Lining up these familiar topics in a clear structure will encourage readers to review their own practices.

Finally, it offers a sensitive meditation on editing, but one that might test the patience of an editor in a hurry to mine the gold of Hart's 20 years of experience with computers.

Of course, one challenge that Hart faced was to cover the technical topics usefully for beginners as well as masters, and he met it well. Judging a user's competence level is tricky: one user's needless digression is another's priceless revelation. Even as I restlessly tapped my toe reading information that seemed basic, I was ambushed by bits of information that were new and useful to me.

The book is ideal for someone new to editing, no computer experience required. For a veteran editor looking for a quick overview, however, there is too much information, too lavishly explicated. Hart often takes the long way round the barn in his explanations; as an editor, I kept wanting to swing a machete. A whole chapter on the benefits of onscreen editing (how many of us have a choice?) seemed superfluous – but later, his discussion of the pros and cons of combining onscreen editing with printouts was profitable. Still, his voice is warm and conversational, and the verbosity feels like generosity.

The danger is that the book's nearly 200,000 words will banish it to the pile of unread user's manuals. That would be a shame because there is a great deal of valuable information for editors at every stage in their careers.

His most useful chapters cover personalizing your computer and word processor, navigating in documents, revision tracking, inserting and deleting text, search tools, style sheets, spelling checkers, and automating your editing. Throughout the book, Hart offers editor-specific strategies for each of the many tools. Following his instructions, editors will increase their speed, consistency, and accuracy, and learn to automate repetitive tasks.

For example, his coverage of revision tracking is clearer than many other explanations I've read. He begins by explaining how to define the appearance of revisions: the style and colour of inserted, deleted, and reformatted text; assigning each reviewer their own colour (which overrides the separate settings for insertions, deletions, and reformatting); inserting vertical bars next to lines containing changes; and whether or not to show comments in balloons and how to print them.

The unexplained materialization of balloons causes panic and rage in many inexperienced users, and knowing how to make them disappear is a great comfort. Strangely, Hart only covers them in Appendix III.

Expanding on revision tracking, he discusses overlooked and mangled revisions, compares ways to accept or reject revisions (one at a time, all at once, changes visible or not), offers advice on collating revisions from multiple reviewers, and considers the psychology of presenting revisions to authors. Little did I know that it is possible to restrict the kinds of changes made by (obstreperous) authors to an editor's revisions (Tools > Protect document > Editing restrictions). His discussion of the Compare Documents feature reveals how handy it can be, and the information on coping with other file formats will save a lot of heartache.

Hart offers important advice on backing up your work, avoiding computer-related health risks, and working securely. At random, one of my favourite tips is how to create custom dictionaries for individual projects or subjects. Open Tools > Options > Spelling and Grammar > Custom Dictionaries. Click the New button and name the dictionary. To add words to a particular dictionary and not to Word's default custom dictionary, select the preferred dictionary in the Custom Dictionaries dialogue box and click the Change Default button.

An onscreen version of the book can be purchased at Hart's website, <http://www.geoff-hart.com/home/onscreen-book.htm>, for US\$20.00; a print-on-demand version is available for £19.28 at lulu.com. On his site, Hart offers the table of contents and Chapter 3, "Writing and editing are human endeavors". Oddly, it is a poor example of the book's scope, but I guess that Hart didn't want to give away the farm by offering one of the richer chapters.

This may be two or three books in one, but I'm glad that I had to plough through the whole thing. It is a treasure house not only for editors but also for anyone who uses a word processor to prepare documents.

William Anthony
Executive Editor, International Council for
the Exploration of the Sea
Bill@ices.dk

Peer Review and Manuscript Management in Scientific Journals: Guidelines for Good Practice. Irene Hames. Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007. 293 pp. £21.50. ISBN 978-1-4051-3159-9



If you want to have an intimate look at what life is like in the editorial office of a scientific journal, this eminently readable book will take you into that world of conflicts, frustrations, difficult decisions, and satisfactions. You will also have a glimpse into the lives of peer reviewers, dictating manuscript reviews into their mobile

phones as they rush from one conference and one country to another.

The author, Irene Hames, has been the managing editor of *The Plant Journal* for many years and has been a member of a number of working parties on peer review. The goal of this book is to provide a basic “how to” guide for people involved in editorial peer review – that is, journal editors, editorial office staff, and publishers. It mentions one previous book on the subject, *Peer Review in Health Sciences*, edited by Fiona Godlee and Tom Jefferson.^[1] Otherwise, it fills an apparent gap in helping journal editors to conduct the process of peer review.

Peer Review and Manuscript Management in Scientific Journals certainly achieves that goal. It covers every conceivable aspect of what must be done before, during, and after peer review, with many pitfalls, terrifying eventualities, and solutions. The steps are outlined clearly, with summary boxes and warnings in “Beware” boxes and a series of checklists in an appendix. A whole chapter is devoted to online submission and review systems. One of the obvious qualities required of a reviewer is an intimate knowledge of the subject to be reviewed. The author of this book review has never worked in an editorial office but has been involved from the author’s point of view, from submission of manuscripts to what is euphemistically known as “dealing with reviewers’ comments”. She was therefore fascinated to find out what goes on in the journal office, and the book goes far beyond peer review to the whole process of manuscript

management. In fact, only about 80 of the nearly 300 pages and three of the nine chapters are devoted to peer review. Nevertheless, the subject is admirably covered within the overall flow of dealing with a manuscript from submission to publication.

One of the main emphases of the book is the importance of being nice – to everyone. Again and again, the editor is reminded that he or she must be fair, polite, thoughtful, and considerate with editorial staff, with authors, and with reviewers. One of the three chapters that deals directly with peer review consists mainly of suggestions for thanking, recompensing, and maintaining the loyalty of reviewers, going so far as “sending them things they may not be able to get in their own countries and develop a craving for, such as certain chocolate bars!” Authors and reviewers are also reminded to be polite and patient. Certainly, such consideration is desirable and editors should be reminded of its necessity, but the extent to which it can be ingrained by advice such as this is doubtful. I would have liked to know more about what the policy of journals actually is, for instance with respect to giving feedback to reviewers, and whether they ask authors submitting a manuscript to a journal after it has been rejected by another to send on the reviews they have already received. Some examples are given in the appendices, for instance with respect to authorship, but more concrete examples would have been helpful.

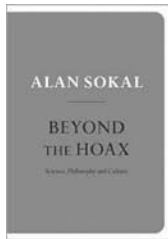
These small carpings do not detract from the fact that this is an excellent book for any journal editor, whether novice or experienced, which will be a valuable guide to either setting up a peer review system from scratch or improving an existing system.

Elisabeth Heseltine
heseltin@club-internet.fr

References

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Beyond the Hoax: Science, Philosophy and Culture. Alan Sokal. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. 448p. ISBN 0 199 23920 7



The “science wars” are still raging, argues Alan Sokal in this book, and the scientific world view of facts and evidence is under more threat now than ever. In these wars, a misnamed debate among humanities academics, realists defend the objectiveness of science, and postmodernists assert that science and logic are merely subjective

social constructs, no more valid than any other means of thinking about the world.

This debate took a turn with an experiment by Sokal in which he submitted a spoof of a postmodernist essay to a cultural studies journal to see whether the humanities academics who were critiquing the validity of science knew what they were arguing about. Would the editors of the non-peer reviewed journal *Social Text* accept “an article liberally salted with nonsense if (a) it sounded good and (b) it flattered the editors’ ideological preconceptions”? They did, and they published the article in 1996.

Beyond the Hoax brings together this paper and Sokal’s subsequent announcement that it was a hoax. The book considers the fallout over the decade after the experiment and the legitimacy and scope of the academic subject of “science studies.” It goes on to lambast the acceptability of “sloppy thinking” that postmodernist discussions have invited. And Sokal blames this disrespect for evidence for the rise in faith over reasoning, which, he says, governments are now using to their advantage to muddy the scientific consensus, for example, on climate change and evolution.

The first chapter of *Beyond the Hoax* reproduces the jargon-rich paper from *Social Text* titled “Transgressing the boundaries: towards a transformative hermeneutics of quantum gravity”. This parody argues that quantum physics itself provides evidence for postmodernist thought: “Quantum gravity informs us that space and time are themselves contextual, their meaning defined only relative to the mode of observation.”

This version is annotated to explain the many hidden jokes—references to the work of philosophers such as Derrida and Lacan, “feminist, queer, multiculturalist, and ecological critiques” and a misuse of scientific terms, which Sokal says characterises science studies essays. He writes, for example: “Physical ‘reality,’ no less than ‘social reality,’ is at the bottom of a social and linguistic construct . . . scientific ‘knowledge,’ far from being objective, reflects and encodes the dominant ideologies . . . of the culture that produced it.”

Sokal simultaneously published an announcement in another humanities journal that his first paper had been “a pastiche of left wing cant, fawning references, grandiose quotations, and outright nonsense . . . structured around the silliest quotations I could find about mathematics and physics” made by postmodernist academics (*Lingua Franca* 1996;May-June:62-4).

Social Text refused the article that comprises the second chapter of *Beyond the Hoax*, in which Sokal explains his experiment (it was subsequently published in *Dissent* 1996;43(4):93-9). He writes, “I’m a stodgy old scientist who believes, naively, that there exists an external world [and] that there exist objective truths about that world.” He goes on to explain his motives as political: “To combat postmodernist/poststructuralist/social-constructivist discourse . . . which is inimical to the values and future of the Left.”

Sokal goes on to consider the implications of his hoax. The themes and legitimacy of science studies is fascinating, especially the analysis of ideas put forward by some feminist critics that modern scientific method is fundamentally misogynistic, even interpreted as the “rape and torture of Nature, viewed as female” by some commentators. In other chapters Sokal discusses what the affair does and does not prove, looks at cognitive relativism in the philosophy of science, and defends “scientific realism”.

In the last part of the work, Sokal seeks to demonstrate how irrational pseudoscience is widespread and funded and promoted as science, using the examples of alternative therapies in nursing, science in India, and radical environmentalism.

Beyond the Hoax is a rewarding read, yet demanding in places, and Sokal tackles some complex ideas about the philosophy of science and the nature of scientific knowledge, but he writes clearly and entertainingly. Sokal’s aim to defend a scientific world view is an admirable one. It seems that irrationality is on the rise: recent newspaper reports have claimed that as many as 40% of UK citizens and 60% of US citizens believe in creationism, which is directly contradicted by scientific evidence. Sokal’s hoax shows the readiness of some people to dismiss evidence based thinking, saying it is no different to faith.

Richard Hurley,
Technical editor, *BMJ*
rhurley@bmj.com

For an interview with Alan Sokal about his book visit www.guardian.co.uk/science/audio/2008/feb/25/science.extra.podcast