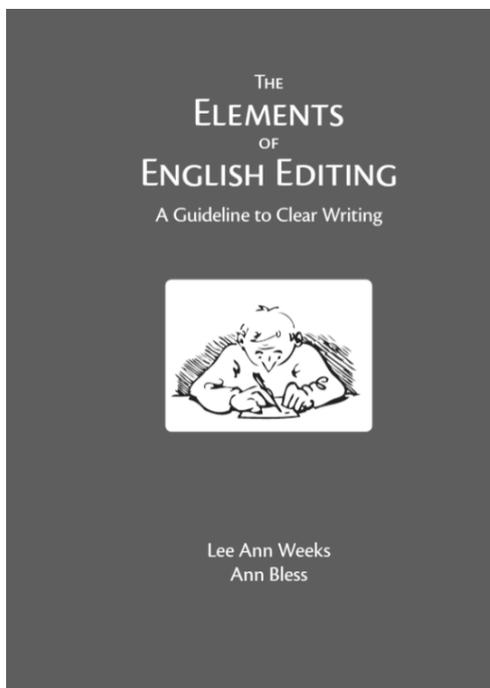


## Book reviews

### The Elements of English Editing. A Guideline to Clear Writing

Lee Ann Weeks and Ann Bless, 2013, *Scientific Editing Service*, Bergen, the Netherlands, 71pp. ISBN 978-90-820504-0-0



This handy little book, measuring 13 x18 cm and with 71 pages bound with a wire spiral binding coil, covers many aspects of editing and provides ingenious exercises to address specific problems. Most of the book is devoted to substantive editing. The other chapters briefly describe translation revision, copy-editing, proofreading and editing on screen. An “editor’s checklist” is given, which summarizes the sections in the chapters on substantive editing and copy-editing. A helpful reference list is provided at the end.

The introduction is very informative, giving the genesis of editing in publishing. Then, in the 27-page section on substantive editing, an exercise is given for each of seven aspects of editing. These are “unfulfilled announcements and missing markers, insufficient differentiation of familiar versus unfamiliar, muddled use of singular and plural, mixed use of positive and negative, inconsistent terminology or structures, insufficient repetition and unclear pronouns.” Each aspect has an explanatory introduction, an “illustration with a problematic construction, articulation of the problem, presentation of a possible revision and an explanation of the suggested revision”. The exercises are clear and helpful.

The title comprises two different aims: editing and clear writing. The second part does not, however, necessarily follow from the first, and it might have been clearer to separate them, indicating that the book is intended to explain the elements of editing and, separately, to state that authors might also find it useful to help them to write clearly. The two are not, after all, synonymous.

The introduction raises the interesting unresolved problem of how to define different levels of editing. The terms “substantive”, “content”, “structural”, “developmental”, “stylistic”, “technical”, “language”, “mechanical” and “copy-” editing and proofreading have all been applied to various aspects of the editor’s work. In this book, they are also not clearly distinguished. Thus, some of the copy-editor’s tasks would appear to overlap with those of the substantive editor, such as “focus and chaining” and “consistency” and “general coherence, repetition of ideas, ambiguity, factual errors, misleading information or disconnected information”. The proofreader’s tasks are defined as finding inconsistencies in the “use of terminology ... and so forth”, especially for “a manuscript involving multiple authors who may have very different writing styles and adhere to very different writing conventions.” Many readers might consider that these tasks go beyond what is expected of (and what is paid) a proofreader.

The short section on translation revision is also interesting, as I am not aware of many guides to this aspect of editing apart from that cited (Mossop, 2007<sup>1</sup>). The proposed alternatives for revising a translation are to “1. Set aside and then self-edit. 2. Check against source. 3. Have someone else check against source. 4. Have someone else edit”. Surely, both self-editing and having someone else edit require checking against the source? Apart from that quibble, I am not sure that this brief chapter has its place in this book. The authors point out that “Editing while translating provides added value for the client at little extra cost for the language professional.” However, both translating and editing a really deficient source text can be extremely time consuming, requiring research and usually several rounds of contact with the author. Lastly, it is not clear that the actual task of revising one’s own or another translator’s text is comparable to editing a manuscript in English.

The three pages on editing on-screen are helpful. The software for including comments is, however, becoming more and more sophisticated, and some of the statements in this section may be out of date already!

In general, this little book is a very handy introduction for the beginning editor. It covers some common problems in editing and sets the reader thought-provoking exercises to resolve them.

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#### Reference

- 1 Mossop B (2007) *Revising and Editing for Translators*, 2nd edition. Manchester: St Jerome Publishing.