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Contemporary problems in a comprehensive editing client project

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Contemporary problems in a comprehensive editing client project

Abstract

Copy editing is often overlooked in any publication process. It's commonly thought that copy editing only consists of correcting grammar and spelling errors. But copy editing is a crucial step in publishing as editors can "translate" a text for its audience. This study demonstrates how effective editing is dependent upon an understanding of how a text functions for its author and its readers.

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CONTEMPORARY PROBLEMS IN A COMPREHENSIVE EDITING CLIENT
PROJECT

By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	2
Introduction.....	2
Background.....	4
Methodology.....	5
Discussion.....	7
Chapters 2 and 3.....	8
Chapters 4 and 5.....	9
Chapters 6 and 7.....	9
Chapters 8 and 9.....	10
Chapters 10 and 11.....	11
Chapters 12 and 14.....	11
Chapters 1, 15, and Introduction.....	12
Conclusion	12
Appendix.....	14
Works Cited	19

ABSTRACT

Copy editing is often overlooked in any publication process. It's commonly thought that copy editing only consists of correcting grammar and spelling errors. But copy editing is a crucial step in publishing as editors can "translate" a text for its audience. This study demonstrates how effective editing is dependent upon an understanding of how a text functions for its author and its readers.

INTRODUCTION

Copy editing is a vital part of the design process in the publishing industry. Editors hold complex jobs that often entail several layers of editing textual design. As a memory aid for editors, the authors of *The Art of Editing* suggests "The Seven C's Plus One" from Don Ranly, journalism professor at the University of Missouri. Editors should strive for documents to be "correct, concise, consistent, complete, clear, coherent, creative, and concrete." Dr. Pinson also provides the "Three R's of Copy-Editing," reader-centered, readable, and right, in *The Art of Editing*.

The edited document for this project was the sixth edition of *Working with Words: A Handbook for Media Writers and Editors (WWW)*, edited by Brian S. Brooks, James L. Pinson, and Jean Gaddy Wilson (ISBN-13: 9780312442675). This edition was published in 2006 by Bedford/St. Martin's. This project was a nonpaid editing job that catalogues and discusses the changes made to *Working with Words*.

Those who are ignorant of the intricate editing process believe that editors simply rearrange text to "sound good" to readers, but editing has depth. For example, an editor must be able to justify why he or she made a change to the text. The original intent of this

project was to portray the issues of copy editing so that they may be better recognized in the academic world. (The copy editor's place is seen in the "typical staff organization" at a newspaper in Figure 1 of the Appendix.) I do not intend for this project to serve as a sort of guide for editors but as proof to those in publishing world and those outside of it that editors serve a complex and underrated role.

One of the many reasons that editing is valued in today's world is the Internet. It is while viewing thousands of Web pages filled with spelling and capitalization errors that we begin to notice a lack of consistency in electronic media. While these documents provide the public with freedom of speech, they are also changing our language. But they are not making speech or writing more informal; instead, they are adding words and modifying syntactic patterns, showing us that language is indeed alive. While it may be difficult to see language at this descriptive point of view, editors are often forced to work in an opposing prescriptive environment.

Editing for clarity often exists on a thin line because of situational analysis. An in-depth analysis of how a document is "situated" allows the editor to understand how it will "work" for its users: the author and readers. Situational analysis looks at the background information, or situation, of the document that is to be edited. This is essential as a careful examination of (1) the author, (2) the reader, and (3) how the document will serve both parties shapes the document's final product. A situational analysis of *Working with Words* will be discussed in the Methodology section.

Another element of situational analysis is served by the use of style guides. Style guides act as a foundation for a document's setup. Each style book has its own set of rules that ensure consistency throughout and between documents, in regards to spelling,

capitalization, punctuation, etc. The rules of style books apply to the publications of a particular group, subject, or publishing house. Like most newspapers, *Working with Words* follows the *Associated Press Stylebook* (AP), which is the style book for most journalists. Thus, this book is directed toward users of AP style, which helps establish the specific audience for the book. Also, when documents from a group follow a shared style, they provide readers with a collective consistency as to how words will be spelled, capitalized, etc. This is seen in small examples that are not as obvious to the typical reader. For example, in AP style, URLs are written as “sitename.com,” but in the *Chicago Manual of Style*, they are written fully as “http://www.sitename.com/.” It is important for writers and editors to follow their publication’s style guide, as this keeps readers from becoming confused by inconsistencies. It is believed that readers subconsciously take in style rules while they read, and they become used to seeing documents of the same group published in those same parameters.

The irony of this project is that the document being edited contains the exact resources for someone in the editing profession. *Working with Words* follows AP style and lists AP style rules for writers and editors to follow. Keeping this in mind was a significant part of the editing process in that any misinformation that went through to publication would conflict with rules in the *AP Stylebook*.

BACKGROUND

During our first meeting, Dr. Pinson described *Working with Words*’ road to publication. Initially, Mr. Brooks had asked Dr. Pinson to be his teaching assistant and hired him to be an editing teacher while Dr. Pinson worked for his PhD. The content that became the

textbook had begun as handouts from Dr. Pinson's classes. Working together, Dr. Pinson and Mr. Brooks established an organized format for the content and completed the first draft in six weeks.

During his many years on the newspaper copy desk, Dr. Pinson had also compiled much of the book's content from his style sheets of common errors he had encountered while copy editing. After countless research in Associated Press reference books (as discussed in the Methodology), he decided to establish a single location for all of this information to be found. The authors then proposed the two functions of the book: (1) its use as a basic textbook for writing and journalism students and (2) as a desk reference book for journalism professionals. This way, *Working with Words* could be read by beginners and used by professionals, spanning a greater audience.

The chapters edited and discussed here were only those written by Dr. Pinson. These included two through 12, 14, and one, in that order. One chapter that was to be omitted, Chapter 13, "Sexism, Racism and Other 'isms,'" was written by Ms. Wilson and was left for her to review. Chapters 15 and 16 were also excluded because those chapters were written by Mr. Brooks.

This background information becomes the situational analysis for *Working with Words*. As an editor, it is crucial to keep this in mind so the text may properly function for its audience.

METHODOLOGY

The form of editing in this project was lighter than first-pass copy editing as the document was already typeset; changes to headings and index references were design

issues that were disregarded.

An important part of editing in the workplace is the fulfillment of deadlines. Editor Stephanie Ricotta, from Bedford/St. Martin's, arranged a production schedule with the three authors of *Working with Words*. This schedule (Figure 2) was used as Dr. Pinson and I edited the book using AP style proofreaders' marks (Figure 3). I followed the "Main text" portion of the schedule, editing only the chapters with "JP," Dr. Pinson's initials, listed next to them. Edits were listed in a "(page, paragraph, line)" format (actual markup copies [Figure 4] could not be sent via e-mail) and will be labeled equally, where applicable, in the following sections. Each list of chapter changes was sent to Dr. Pinson via e-mail. The deadlines for each chapter were listed in the third column of the schedule chart, headed "Ms. to SR." Dr. Pinson had final say on the corrections made for each chapter and when finished, he would submit them to Ms. Ricotta as an .rtf or a .doc file. These files were typeset would be ready to be submitted for proofreading after the editor's go-ahead.

Few meetings with Dr. Pinson took place, as exchanging the edits via e-mail was the most efficient method. The initial meeting with Dr. Pinson explained the justifications for publishing *Working with Words*. This included the book's origin and the intentions of its publication, as discussed in the Background.

One particular meeting with Dr. Pinson, on January 12, 2009, involved the Chapters 10 and 11 set due date. However, the topic of conversation at this meeting turned to the use of the dictionaries approved by the Associated Press. When the spelling or hyphenation of a word cannot be found in the *Associated Press Stylebook*, a writer or editor should look it up in the *Webster's New World College Dictionary*. If it cannot be

found there, it should be sought out in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*. If it cannot be found there, a word should be spelled as two words if it's used as a noun or verb and hyphenated if used as an adjective. Rules like these set a standard of language that is used by the Associated Press and are often the subject of discussion for editors.

In many cases of more comprehensive editing, "user tests" are required to examine how readers respond to the product. The concept of usability is common for those associated with the Society for Technical Communication. Editors or writers often approach readers with one possible outcome of a document. The readers' response helps the designer, editor, or writer see how the audience is using a document. It causes the textual designer to ask, "How does this function for readers?" or "What is important to readers?" This document did not require user tests because the changes were not significant enough and, going into its seventh edition, the text had been neatly typeset. In the absence of user tests, Dr. Pinson and I discussed our changes via e-mail.

DISCUSSION

The errors found throughout *Working with Words* were not necessarily large in their numbers. Usually, a single word or part of a word was to be changed, mostly for clarity. This was because *WWW* was going into its seventh edition, meaning that most of the surface errors had been caught in previous reads. However, this did leave time for the authors to go over his or her work and consider why he or she had originally written the text in that manner. As editor, I was able to look over the text and prompt such considerations from the author.

Typically, the errors found throughout the process lessened in number as the

chapters progressed. I became used to the style and language that was *WWW* and adapted as an editor accordingly.

The amount of errors found was not only affected by the quantity of content but also by what kind. For example, it was far more difficult to find grammatical errors in chapters written about grammar as the concept itself was challenging to grasp. On the other hand, it was easier to find errors in lists where mere access to a dictionary was required for problem solving.

Many of the errors were associated with time and impermanence. For instance, the “One Word, Two Words or Hyphenated?” section in Chapter 10 had a list containing brand names, some of which had changed over time, now using hyphen or solidifying their words.

One particular error that was to arise in the majority of chapters was “log onto” (29, 1, 2). As it was used in a recurring “Online Grammar Help Box,” “log on” was a phrasal verb and “to” a preposition, meaning that “on” and “to” should be printed as separate words.

Each chapter set taught at least one important lesson about the professional editing process that is worth mentioning here for academic purposes. Unfortunately, there are far too many changes and lessons to discuss here.

These errors will be briefly discussed as ordered by chapter deadlines.

CHAPTERS 2 AND 3

The book’s first unit, “Grammar and Usage,” contained chapters one through eight. The list of changes for Chapters 2 (“Phrases, Clauses and Sentences”) and 3 (“Subjects and

Objects”) were my introduction to the style and consistency of *Working with Words*. For example, I noted three queries of capitalizing the word “Pages,” which was used in the book to direct readers to more information [(27, 7, 1), (28, 1, 1), (28, 2, 5)]. Dr. Pinson responded that this capitalization was simply “the style for the book.” Collectively, 32 errors were found in Chapters 2 and 3, but only 14 were accepted into the submitted version. These edits also served as a style shift for me, as I was used to using the *Chicago Manual of Style* at another job and had not used AP in some time. I was reminded that AP will generally capitalize prepositions (in titles) that are four or more letters (28, 1, 1). Also, the distinction among hyphens (-), em dashes (—), and en dashes (–) was found insignificant in AP style (29, 1, 2).

CHAPTERS 4 AND 5

Twenty-three errors were found in Chapter 4 (“Verbs”) and 5 (“Making the Parts Agree”). Nine of these were changed, although many of them were queries. Two of these queries were design issues, concerning text breaks. These concerns were left to the typesetter. Two phrases of interest arose: “usually is” and “[i]t can even sometimes” [(52, 2, 3), (77, 2, 2)]. These were interesting as they display the significance of proofreading. Somehow these phrases had slipped through several versions of the textbook until they were changed to “is usually” and “[i]t can sometimes.” Of all the chapters, proofreading proved the most useful in 4 and 5.

CHAPTERS 6 AND 7

Only six edits were found for Chapter 6 (“Modifiers and Connecting Words”) and only

one for Chapter 7 (“Getting Words in the Right Order”). This is mainly because these chapters were smaller than previous ones. Three changes were made, and two received positive feedback from Dr. Pinson. Another wording issue, “often can,” arose (103, 4, 2). One interesting catch that was made was to “Italicize ‘4-year-old’ and delete ‘boy’” (97, 1, 4). This error was listed under a bullet point: “Ages are not hyphenated in a predicate adjective” (97). I marked up the original to show where the changes should be made, but a lack of proper explanation potentially kept the change from coming through on the final copy. Although some errors are easier to explain than others, this was an excellent example of the complex language comprehension that is involved in publishing.

CHAPTERS 8 AND 9

Chapter 8 (“Usage: Finding the Right Word”) reached almost 60 pages in length and required the most time to edit. Chapter 9 (“Punctuation”) began the book’s second unit, “Mechanics.” Only three errors turned up in Chapter 9 because Chapter 8 was quite time-consuming, however, these were more queries than errors. Chapter 8’s length caught me off guard and showed me that dividing up the deadlines by chapter proved to be a difficult task. Regardless, 17 errors were found in Chapter 8, although only five were used. The length in Chapter 8 was due to two lists: “Misused Words and Mistaken Phrases” and “Confused Words.” In updating *WWW* for its seventh edition, Dr. Pinson had decided to combine these two lists for “ease of reference.” My changes were to be combined with the new version as they were sent in. Many of the words on these lists were homonyms and required a dictionary for absolute accuracy of distinction. For the sake of time, only the most immediate changes were made for Chapter 8, the majority of

which concerned the wordings of definitions and how they served as different parts of speech (noun, adjective, verb, etc.).

CHAPTERS 10 AND 11

Only five errors were found in Chapter 10 (“Spelling Relief”) and Chapter 11 (“Writing as a Journalist”). Chapter 11 began the book’s third unit, “Style.” This marked the first updated URL for *WWW*, which was listed as “Web Resource” (224). This was one type of error that showed the impermanence involved in editing. URLs, among other items, are likely to change how they are presented in print documents. Without active Web links that initiate interactive learning, a print document is required to update URLs often or publish an outdated or broken link. The “One Word, Two Words or Hyphenated?” section required Internet research to fix misspelled brand names. Also, surprisingly and despite the book’s style, “pages” was found twice lowercased, thanks to proofreading [(233, 3, 3), (233, 3, 5)].

CHAPTERS 12 AND 14

As Dr. Pinson and I planned for the following deadline, Chapter 12 (“Conciseness”) and Chapter 14 (“Writing News That’s Fit for Print”) were somewhat hectic and sent in a larger number of e-mails than usual. There was but one error found in Chapter 12 and an updated URL (273). Two more URLs were updated for Chapter 14 as well as a list of inconsistencies:

(311, 8, 2)
 (312, 1, 1)
 (312, 1, 2)

(314, 4, 2)
(315, 4, 6)
(316, second bullet, 1)
(316, under second bullet, 1)
(316, under second bullet, 3)

CHAPTERS 1, 15, AND INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 (“Grammar Basics”), Chapter 15 (“Writing News for Broadcast”), and the “Introduction for Students” were edited last as Dr. Pinson decided it would be easiest to add in any necessary changes from other chapters into the introductory ones last. He also waited to revise his section on the Internet, as this information is ever-updating. This was a time-constraining week as the deadline changed from two chapters due in two weeks to three chapters due in one week. I completed a list of errors for Chapter 15 first, uncovering 10. One find that I was interested in was to change a sentence into a list form (334, second bullet):

The story’s slug
The time of the broadcast
The date of the broadcast
The reporter’s name

As I learned from Chapters 6 and 7, I typed out my query as clearly as I could to ensure that if the change was significant to the reader’s understanding, it would be made.

Luckily, my idea was considered but couldn’t be used because of lack of space. A similar layout issue came up from Chapter 15, giving me yet another chance to practice the explanations of my catches. Governmental officials’ names were also updated, exchanging “Gov. Engler” for a more news-worthy “Gov. Schwarzenegger.” Similar changes (only two) were observed for Chapter 1, but not made. In the end, Dr. Pinson

was pleased to announce that Chapter 1 seemed to “sum up the book quite well.”

CONCLUSION

As one of my first professional editing projects, *Working with Words* was a positive experience. It was rewarding to work indirectly with a publisher to modify the content of a future textbook edition. It gave me the feel of a freelance editing job, where I was able to edit at home and submit my work via e-mail; I very much enjoyed this freedom.

Overall, I am quite satisfied with everything I have gained from this project as well as the outcome of the manuscript. I thank Dr. Pinson greatly for allowing me the time to take part in this endeavor. My response to Dr. Pinson’s comments or the final changes was not necessary, so I am very grateful that he took the time to discuss them with me, all for the love of editing.

In having worked on and published a project about editing, I hope that its complexities will be better understood in the academic world. Many people often think that editors have a simple task, while others believe editors have an understanding of language that they themselves could never obtain. It is definitely not an easy profession, but it does have me hooked. While working on this project, I did not learn everything I will need to know for a professional editing job, but I hope that I will have the opportunity to learn more with every new job I take on.

APPENDIX

Figure 1. The “typical staff organization” at a newspaper, from *The Art of Editing* (Brooks, Pinson, Sissors, 39).

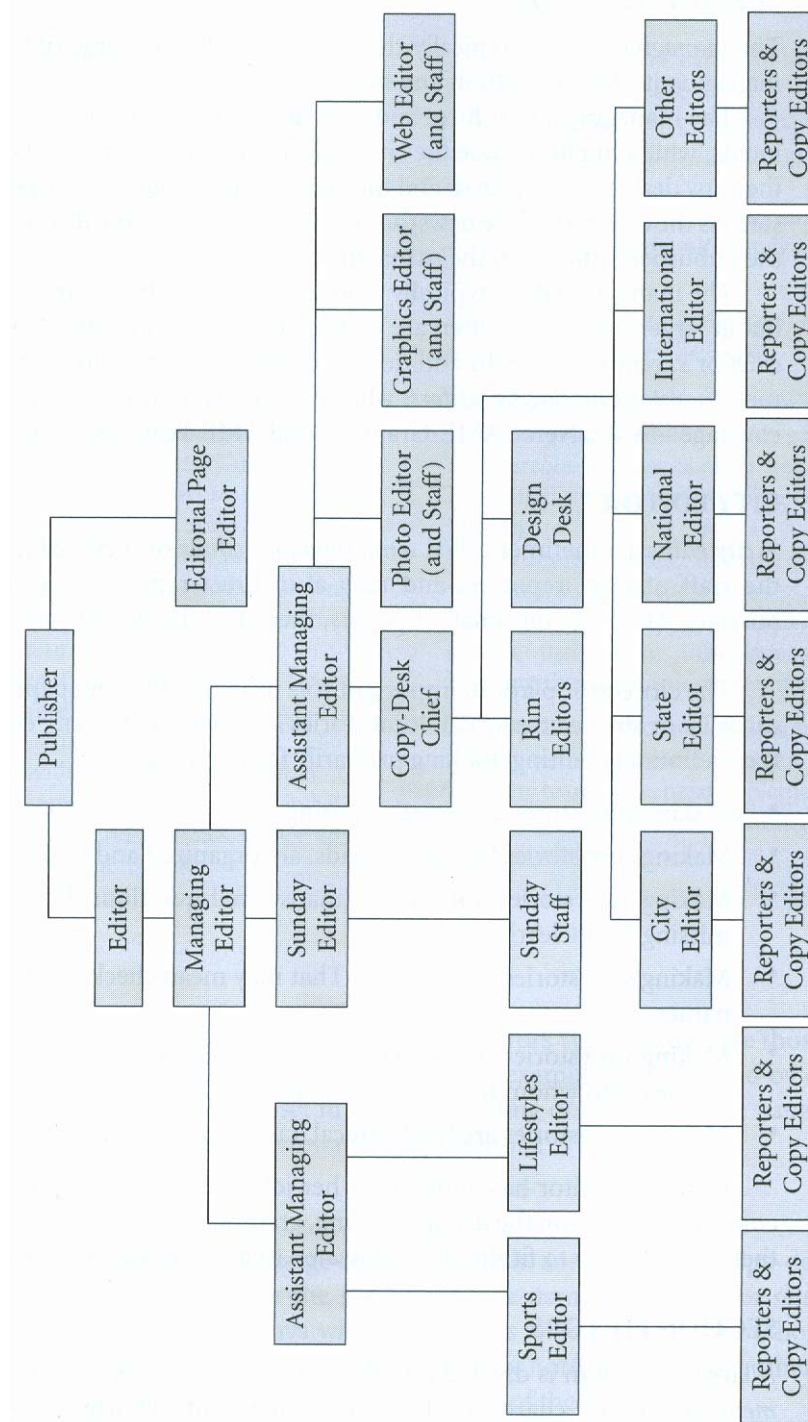


Figure 2. Chapter production schedule as arranged with Bedford/St. Martin's editor.**Main text**

Chapter	Author	Ms. to SR	Edited ms. to au	Ms. to SR
16*	BB	11/24/08	12/8/08	12/22/08
2	JP	12/1/08	12/15/08	12/29/08
3	JP	12/1/08	12/15/08	12/29/08
App	BB	12/5/08	1/19/09	2/2/09
4	JP	12/15/08	12/29/08	1/5/09
5	JP	12/15/08	12/29/08	1/5/09
6	JP	12/29/08	1/5/09	1/19/09
7	JP	12/29/08	1/5/09	1/19/09
8	JP	1/5/09	1/19/09	2/2/09
9	JP	1/5/09	1/19/09	2/2/09
13*	JGW	1/5/09	1/19/09	2/2/09
10	JP	1/19/09	2/2/09	2/9/09
11	JP	1/19/09	2/2/09	2/9/09
12	JP	2/2/09	2/9/09	2/16/09
14	JP	2/2/09	2/9/09	2/16/09
15	JP	2/9/09	2/16/09	2/23/09
Intro*	JP	2/9/09	2/16/09	2/23/09
1*	JP	2/9/09	2/16/09	2/23/09

*out of order

Workbook and Answer Key

Chapter	Ms. to SR
Pretest/CE Sym.-5	3/15/09
6-10	4/1/09
11-15	4/15/09
App and Storyediting	5/1/09

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Figure 3. Proofreaders' Marks, from *The Associated Press Stylebook* (Norm Goldstein, ed., 376-7).

PROOFREADERS' MARKS

<p>¶ ATLANTA (AP)—The organization said Thursday. It was the first the last attempts.</p> <p>With this the president tried the Jones Smith company is not over a period of sixty or more years there were in the group. Ada, Oklahoma is the hometown The Ga man was the guest of prince edward said it was his as a result, this will be</p> <p>the ac cuser pointed to them In these times it is necessary the order for the later devices The ruling a fine example according to the this source</p>	<p>indent for paragraph paragraph no paragraph</p> <p>transpose</p> <p>use figures spell it out abbreviate don't abbreviate</p> <p>uppercase lowercase</p> <p>remove space insert space retain insert word delete</p>
---	---

<p>BF □ By DONALD AMES □</p> <p>J.R. Thomas]</p> <p>[J.R. Thomas</p> <p>↕</p> <p>↓</p> <p>↵ ↵</p> <p>⊗ or ⊙</p> <p>=</p> <p>—</p>	<p>boldface, center flush right flush left insert comma insert apostrophe insert quotation marks insert period hyphen dash</p>
--	--

Figure 4. An example of a marked up copy from *The Art of Editing* (Brooks, Pinson, Sissors, 46).

BLUE LAW

] ^{State} ^{capital} ^{bureau} [

~~Missouri's city streets and stores will continue to be deserted on Sundays, at least for another year.~~

[JEFFERSON CITY, MO.,

(The House Tuesday afternoon rejected a bill that would have ^{submitted} ~~mitted the repeal of the state's blue laws to the voters in November.~~)

The measure was ^{soundly} defeated 97-53, with two members present ~~but not voting.~~

The state's blue laws, or Sunday closing laws, prohibit ^{Sunday} ~~the~~ sale of nonessential ~~chosen~~ ^{goods} merchandise, including ^{four = hour} ~~auto~~ automobiles, clothing, jewelry and hardware ~~items.~~

During a ^{lengthy} ~~lengthy~~ debate that lasted ^{four = hour} ~~four hours~~, the original bill was amended to ^{several times} ~~place~~ the issue on this November's ballot, and another ~~would have required.~~

The bill also was amended to require that counties and cities ~~exercise local option to approve repeal of blue laws locally if the measure was approved by voters in Nov.~~ ^{decide whether to} ~~exercise~~ ^{the} ~~of~~ ^{within their jurisdictions,} ~~blue laws locally if the~~ ~~measure was approved by voters in Nov.~~

Several amendments were defeated. ^{One} ~~that would have required employers to pay as much as twice the wages per hour to employes ^{who} ~~working~~ on Sundays.~~ Another would have set a ^{increase wages for} ~~one amendment would have placed~~

Rep. James Russell, a Florissant Democrat, ~~included in one amendment the proviso that employers be fined \$1,000 ^{fine} for each violation of the wage requirements. His amendment lost.~~

Yet ^{defeated} ~~Another~~ amendment introduced by Rep. Jerry McBride, St. Louis, would have levied a ^{1 = cent} ~~1/4~~ excise tax on retail businesses open on Sunday. ^{would} ~~Proceeds~~ from this were to have gone to city and county treasuries.

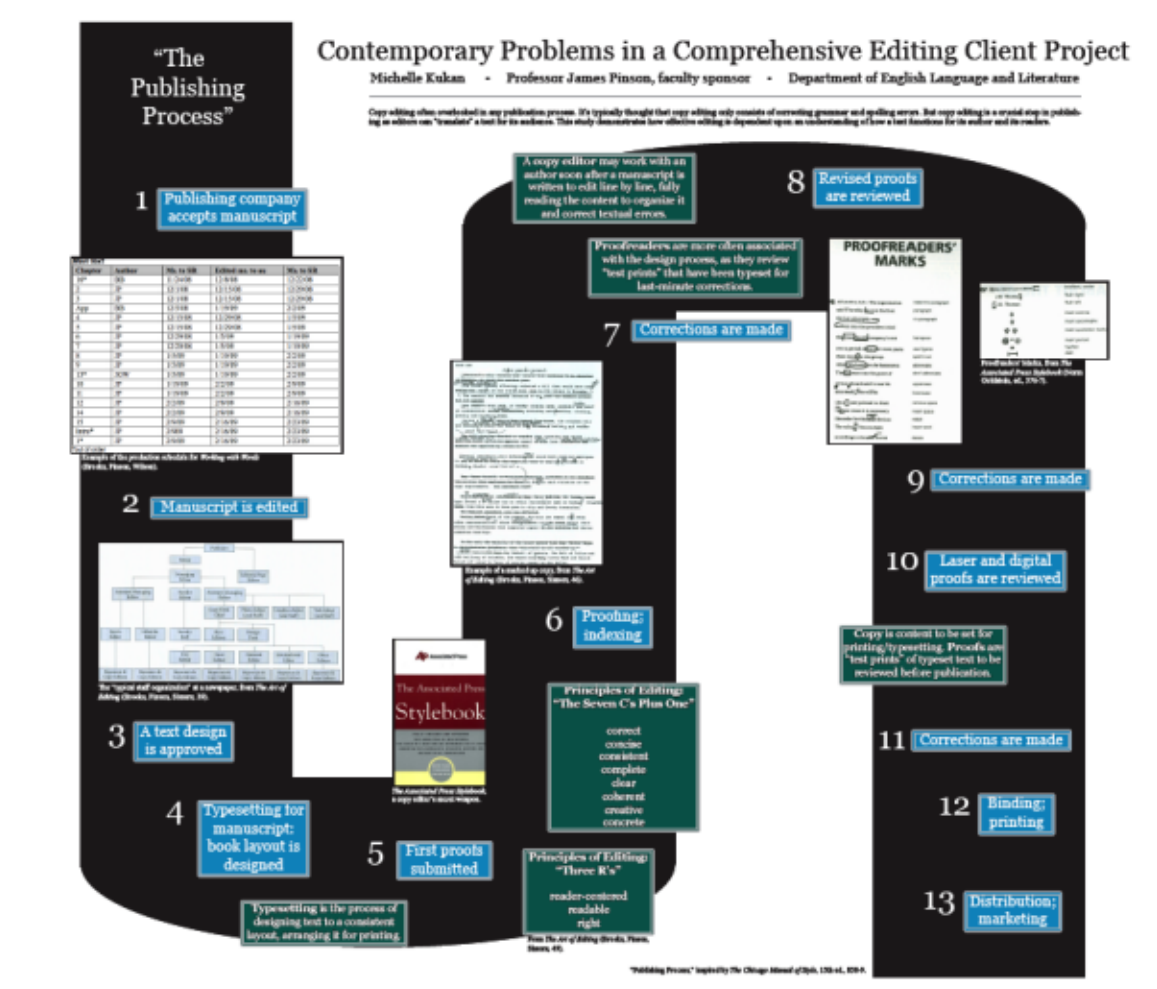
The McBride amendment also was defeated.

During ~~debate~~ ^{much} of the support for blue law repeal came from urban representatives whose ^{districts} ~~constituents~~ include large retail chain stores and businesses that supported repeal ~~of the existing law~~ during committee hearings.

In the end, the majority of the house agreed with Rep. Walter Meyer D. Bellefontaine Neighbors, that "this bill is all screwed up."

[^{Area} ~~Local Democratic Reps.~~ Ray Hamlett of Ladonia, Joe Holt of Fulton and John Rollins, of Columbia, and Republican ^{Reps.} ~~Reps.~~ Larry Mead and Harold Reisch all voted in favor of putting repeal on the ballot.

Figure 5. The project's visual aid as presented at the 29th Undergraduate Symposium.



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