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From the University Presses -- Added by Copyediting

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I

highly technical, where equations and formul
dominate and equations and formul
leave less scope for a copyeditor’s skills with
language to be deployed. (I am assured by one
tutor who responded to a draft of this article
and has done substantive and developmental
editing on thousands of scientific articles,
however, that there is still wide scope for
significant editing. As he says, even in highly
technical articles “the equations are usually ac-
companied by thickets of impenetrable prose,”
and a lot of his work “involves making sure
that the text and the equations say the same
thing.” He also adds that he checks “the basic
math in tables, since it’s amazing how often scientists
get the sums and averages wrong.”) For journals in the humanities and social sci-
ences, at any rate, copyediting surely must
continue to play a major role in the process of
quality control. As advocates of open access,
having scored significant victories in the realm
of scientific, technical, and medical (STM)
publishing including the mandate for deposit of
NIH-funded research articles in PubMed
Central, now move on to rally scholars in the
liberal arts to their cause, this role deserves
more understanding and emphasis than it has
hitherto received.

I admit here to a personal bias. I began
my publishing career in 1967 working at
Princeton University Press as a copyeditor.
Even after becoming social science editor, then
assistant director, and finally editor-in-chief
there, I still copyedited manuscripts from
time to time for the sheer enjoyment of doing
so. And even for the first several years after
becoming director at Penn State University
Press, I took on a few manuscripts every year
to copyedit — until copyediting went the way of
everything else and became a job carried out
mainly on computers. Not that I have anything
gainst editing on computers, mind you, but I
do miss the tactile pleasure of wielding a blue
pencil to make marks on paper. And once a
抄写者，总是一个抄写者：这是痛苦的，
痛苦阅读数舞本日因为的
多固有和他并
在发布。一个特别的鸽子
在签名的看前计数找到了
在饭馆和宠物店
说“10或更少”的。应当在。

At first, as a beginning editor, I was appalled
to find so many mistakes in the footnotes of
even senior scholars. I especially remember
an expert on Martin Luther whose chapter in
an edited volume contained multiple errors in
the citations to the authoritative edition of
Luther’s works, which I systematically
crosschecked in the Princeton library after becom-
ing suspicious. I also recall a major scholar
on Voltaire having similarly been in need of
such remedial assistance. And an author of
a book about John Stuart Mill, I discovered,
had many of his quotations from Mill wrong,
as I discovered when I checked the originals.
Any copyeditor can tell such tales of scholarly
lapses many times over. They know how much
their help is needed by scholars. Perhaps the
most memorable example in my experience
is a book that won a Pulitzer Prize whose
copyeditor, I was aware, had done a yeoman’s
job of rewriting the work. I was foolish enough
to have mentioned this example, naming
the title and author, in a public forum once
and subsequently received a letter from the
author’s attorney threatening a libel suit if I
did not publicly retract my comment and offer
an apology. But fortunately, from my connec-
tions with the legal community on copyright
matters, I was able to benefit from pro bono
advice from an expert on
the

Biz of Acq
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in the process of being created and the result
has been that I look at it once, find very little
information I need, and don’t remember to
check back later, when the resource has been
fully populated.

Since the announcement, we have taken
every opportunity to put the wiki in front
of the bibliographers. For example, a mass
email announcing training sessions on a new
online ordering system will include a link to
screenshots posted up on the wiki. During
these training sessions, I show both the new
ordering system and the place in the wiki
where the bibliographers can find a review of the
session. In casual conversations and meetings,
I ask if there are any documents or procedures
they would like to see in the wiki.

Also, when there is a new procedure or
document, I highlight it within the wiki by
adding a star next to the link or by moving the
link to the banner at the top of the main page.
The wiki can be changed quickly, so when the
document is no longer the newest and most
relevant link, the star can be removed or the
link returned to its original place.

If Not A Wiki, Then What?

While we use a wiki, the central idea is
not the tool itself, but the creation of a stable
space for bibliographers to access up-to-date
acquisitions-related information. Too often the
available information is scattered or outdated,
leading to miscommunication and endless
repetitions and retractions on the same pro-
cedures. By dedicating an area of the library
webspace for Acquisitions communication
to bibliographers, all parties save time and effort
by having a single reference point for the work
they do together.

I therefore marvel at the readiness of so
many advocates of open access, starting with
Stevan Harnad who has long championed
what he calls Green OA (which means authors’
self-archiving of their peer-reviewed, but not
yet copyedited, articles on their personal Web-
sites and those of their institutions), to accept
a world in which scholarly communication will
increasingly be dominated by writing that has
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not benefited from the copyediting that publishers supply as value added to the process. Scholars who are jumping on this bandwagon should think twice about exposing their unedited prose, warts and all, to the world before it gets treated and refined by accommodating copyeditors.

Maybe the faculty at Harvard in the arts and sciences, and now in the law school, or those who have followed suit at Stanford’s School of Education think their prose is beyond reproach and in need of no such patching and repairing. Wrong! Two of the three authors whose writings I used as examples above came from Harvard (and the third from Princeton). The administrators at Harvard who have championed making the work of the faculty freely available on the Internet seem completely oblivious to this danger of exposing so much bad and error-filled writing. Now they would prefer, of course, to have PDFs of the final articles as published mounted on Harvard’s institutional repository. But surely they are not naïve enough to think that most publishers will comply with their wish, at the risk of undermining their own businesses — and I include here university presses and society publishers as well as for-profit companies. To avoid potential embarrassment, they therefore have two choices: either hire staff to copyedit the articles before they go up on Harvard’s site or help authors pay fees to publishers that will compensate them for allowing final published articles to be available via open access. The former choice would be expensive and administratively cumbersome, not to mention adding yet another version of the work. The latter would be administratively easier but expensive, too, thus not really helping to solve the problem of the high cost of journal publishing that the proposal was intended to accomplish. Instead of paying for subscriptions, Harvard would simply be substituting payment of OA fees, with little likelihood that the overall costs of the system would be reduced in any significant way.

The problem of having multiple versions of articles is a real cost of Green OA that needs to be studied further. Perhaps, for purposes of teaching in the classroom or simply sharing knowledge with colleagues around the world, unedited versions would suffice. But even at this level there are risks of propagating errors, as in mistakes in quotations that once used incorrectly may be multiplied many times over, as readers do not bother to go back to the original sources to check for accuracy but trust the authority of the scholar using them to have them validated. “There is a wonton component to the text, the author who edits articles for science journals confirms the seriousness of this problem: “huge errors can creep into the literature when authors use preprint [unedited, unreviewed] versions of papers, and the problem snowballs: so few authors return to primary sources that incorrect interpretations are perpetuated and persist in the literature to damage future generations.”)

Surely, then, for purposes of formal publication, the additional level of quality control that is provided by good copyediting is a value worth paying for, and libraries would do well to reflect whether their needs as repositories of authoritative knowledge would be well served by relying on anything but the versions of articles that are in their very final form, suitable for long-term archiving. Whether students and scholars who access the unedited versions will bother to go to the archival versions for citations in writings that they produce remains to be seen, but clearly they should be encouraged to do so — students, because they need to be taught responsible scholarly methods, and scholars, because they have a professional obligation to their peers to do so.

Why big a problem may this turn out to be? Some sense of it comes from a recently published, and much discussed, paper with the cute subtitle “Fawltys Towers of Knowledge?” by Malcolm Wright and J. Scott Armstrong in the March/April 2008 issue of Interfaces, who write on “The Ombudsman: Verification of Citations” (http://marketing.wharton.upenn.edu/Marketing_Content_Management/Marketing_files/Publication_Files/Citations-Interfaces.pdf). Their first paragraph neatly summarizes the nature and extent of the problem: “The growth of scientific knowledge requires the correct reporting of relevant studies. Unfortunately, current procedures give little assurance that authors of papers published in leading academic journals follow this practice. Instead, the evidence suggests that researchers often do not read the relevant research papers. This manifests itself in two ways:

First, researchers overlook relevant papers. Second, they make errors when reporting on the papers, either through incorrect referencing or incorrect quotation of the contents of the cited paper.” They go on to cite previous studies of incorrect references in other disciplines ranging from 31 percent in public health journals to as high as 67 percent in obstetrics and gynecology journals and studies of errors in quotation with similarly disturbing numbers, such as 20 percent for medical journals in a systematic survey conducted in 2003. Remember that these errors occur in published articles. The likelihood is that the rates would be significantly higher without the intervention of copyeditors.

The fact is that, for all the value of peer review, it is the rare academic reader who will take the trouble to check references and quotations for accuracy. Scholars are aware that copyeditors can be relied upon to scrutinize manuscripts more closely for specific details, so they generally do not bother to spend time on this task themselves. But even copyeditors cannot afford to check everything; it is very costly to do the kind of fine-grained editing, involving trips to the library, that I was allowed to do at Princeton forty years ago. The economics of publishing can no longer afford such a luxury, and many publishers have cut back on proof-reading, too, or even eliminated it altogether for cost-saving reasons. Fortunately, the ease of access to reliable online resources for fact-checking, reference-checking, and even checking of quotes has made it possible for copyeditors to continue doing some of this very detailed work even in today’s economy at reasonable expense. And editing online provides other advantages that improve the efficiency of copyeditors and help keep costs in check. It would be a shame if concerns for reducing costs target copyediting as a dispensable frill, for its contribution to the excellence of scholarship is much greater than most people who have not directly benefited from it realize.

I end, therefore, with a question and a plea. The question is: how far do we want to allow open access to exacerbate the problem of “Fawly Towers of Knowledge?” The plea is: when open access is discussed as a panacea for facilitating the dissemination of knowledge worldwide, don’t forget the contribution that good copyediting makes to ensuring that such “knowledge” is communicated clearly and accurately.

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From the Reference Desk
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suggested, for maintaining and expanding existing collections. It can also serve double duty as a helpful primer and guide to the reference literature for library schools students as well as newly minted professionals.

Librarians responsible for reference collections at small and medium size public libraries as well as those working in branches of larger systems will welcome this work. Reference librarians new to the field as well as students may also want to add it to their personal collections.

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purpose of providing selection guidance. Entries also include most of the bibliographic information necessary for ordering including ISBN or ISSN numbers. Interestingly, individual prices are not provided. Rather a rating system using the dollar sign is used. Hence sources ranging from free Websites to books less than 100 dollars are rated as a $ while a database costing more than 1000 dollars would be rated as $$$$. This make some sense given the growing volatility of prices, as any Amazon search will confirm. The availability of free reference Websites also plays into this rationale.

Reference Sources for Small and Medium Size Libraries is a valuable and important tool.

It gives professional reference librarians an authoritative list of respected works for initiating collection development in a new library as well as recommended sources for maintaining and expanding existing collections. It can also serve double duty as a helpful primer and guide to the reference literature for library schools students as well as newly minted professionals.

Librarians responsible for reference collections at small and medium size public libraries as well as those working in branches of larger systems will welcome this work. Reference librarians new to the field as well as students may also want to add it to their personal collections.

<http://www.against-the-grain.com>