**Basic Writing/Proofreading**

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**Definition of Proofreading**

Proofreading is the process of carefully reviewing a text for errors, especially surface errors such as spelling, punctuation, grammar, formatting, and typing errors.

**Proofreading vs. Editing**

While the terms *proofreading* and *editing* are often used interchangeably, they do differ slightly.

[Editing](http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Basic_Writing/Editing) is typically completed throughout the writing process—especially between drafts—and often suggests contextual changes that affect the overall meaning and presentation. The focus is on changes that affect style, point-of-view, organization of content, audience, etc.

Proofreading occurs later in the writing process, usually just after the final editing and before the final draft that will be presented for publication (or turned in to a professor). The focus is on correcting errors in spelling, syntax, grammar, punctuation, and formatting.

While some editing will inevitably be done during the proofreading process and vice versa—the writing process is not perfectly linear, after all—focusing on proofreading too early in the writing process is often inefficient because with each revision new errors are introduced. In other words, one does not want to spend a lot of time correcting sentences and paragraphs that may soon be rewritten or even deleted completely.

**Examples of Common Errors**

While many types of errors exist in writing, there are some that are more common and definitely more noticeable. Some of these errors include spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, subject\verb agreement, and word usage.

A word processor's spell-checker will detect most **spelling** mistakes. However, if you are writing a paper out longhand, using a good college-edition dictionary can help you prevent many of these mistakes (unless of course, you also can't guess which letter begins the word). If you lack a spelling-bone (I think it's near the funny bone because it is another bone that hurts when it bumps against something), a good strategy to use is to keep a notebook of problem words. You can add words to it each time you have to look a word up in the dictionary, and eventually you will have your own mini-dictionary of words to check more closely. Some people still prefer to do the old grade-school thing and write the word out in longhand twelve times, sounding it out as you write. For example, *surprise*. Sounded out, it is *sǔr* (as in Big Sur in California) *prise* (where the *i* sounds like a French *ee* vowel sound, and you can picture yourself being surprised while sipping espresso on the *Rive Gauche* in Paris. The sound and the image combined may help you remember the spelling.

Punctuation errors most often involve the **comma**, which means knowing when and how to use one. Of course, that's easier said than done. The **comma splice** seems to be an especially common error among writers. A *comma splice* is defined as a sentence that contains two or more complete sentences joined together by a comma. American university professors tend to see it as a major mechanical error. Rumor has it that once in the distant past there was a university in Colorado where any paper with even a single comma splice would receive an automatic F with no exceptions allowed. Hopefully, no extreme cases like that exist now, but avoid comma splices if you're writing for an American audience. If you are in Great Britain, that's another story—comma splices are cheerfully ignored for the most part. Audience truly matters in writing, even on the grammatical/mechanical level.

Although some style guides list nearly two dozen comma rules, there are basically five comma rules you need to know:

1. Use a comma with a coordinating conjunction to join two independent clauses. In Layman's terms, fix a comma splice by adding one of the following: and, but, for, so, or, nor, or yet.

2. Use a comma to set off non-essential information in a sentence. Basically, put commas around extra information that is not part of the main idea.

3. Use a comma in lists or items in a series.

4. Use commas in addresses and dates.

5. Use a comma between adjectives if they make sense with the order reversed or with "and" inserted in between them.

The Wildcard Rule: There are always exceptions to the rules, and often it is just a matter of personal preference and style. Think about your purpose and your audience; then decide whether or not a comma makes the sentence clearer or is just an extra mark on the page. Sometimes having too many commas is a worse problem than not having enough commas.

**Verb tense** and **subject/verb agreement** are also key errors that should be looked for when proofreading a paper. The subject should always agree with the verb in tense and number. These verb issues are often overlooked or unnoticed while writing an initial draft but can usually be caught with a good proofread.

Methods on how to find these verb tense problems, among with other mistakes, will be discussed in the next section.

**Strategies for Finding Errors**

It's often difficult to find your own errors. In this section we will discuss how to look at your own work carefully to spot errors.

The first thing to do is to allow some time between writing and proofreading. Some people recommend letting a text set as long as two weeks before looking over it for mistakes, but that is usually not practical. Instead, try to give yourself at least one full day between finishing your draft and proofreading. In other words, sleep on it. If the deadline is quickly approaching or it is due the next morning, take as much time as you can--an hour or two will do wonders. At minimum, try to take at least take fifteen minutes after the completion of the paper before going back and proofreading. This allows you to look at the same piece of work with a clear eye and a fresh mind.

Second, the paper should be read aloud. Can you make it through without stumbling over anything? Many grammar or word usage errors are not picked up on until the piece is read aloud. Also, have someone else read your work for you (aloud, if possible, so you can hear where the words or punctuation are leading the reader away from your intended meaning). A peer or family member with some distance can also let you know if the progression of the paper needs help, or if something doesn't quite make sense. Do not be afraid to strike out a passage that you thought sounded great, but others are having a hard time understanding.

You can also read the work backwards, one sentence at a time. This helps determine if each sentence, independent of anything else, makes sense. Ask yourself these questions: Are the sentences complete? Does each sentence have a subject (who or what the sentence is about) and a predicate (what's happening in the sentence)? Note which ones need to be changed and why.

Finally, get help! If you're not sure about something, such as the use of a comma or spelling, find a resource or assistance. You can use the writing center at your school, a tutor, the internet, or something as convenient and portable as a grammar book or dictionary!

**Common Errors and Correction Strategies**

**Spelling**

Don't forget to use your word processor's spell-check feature to identify spelling mistakes. Do a quick visual check for squiggly lines, run the actual spell-check function, and then do a closer check for misspellings or wrong word choices that the spell-checker missed. Although spell-checking is important and should not be skipped, a real-live human can often catch errors that computer software will miss because people are more capable of understanding words in context. For example, spell-check software can't always tell whether *their*, *there*, or *they're* fits in a specific sentence, but a person can always figure it out by looking at the definitions for these homonyms.

Don't forget the low-tech solution: always use a dictionary to confirm any word you're unsure about. Although the built-in dictionary that comes with your word processor is a great time-saver, it falls far short of a college-edition dictionary in paper or CD form. So, if spell-check suggests bizarre corrections for one of your words, it could be that you know a word it doesn't. When in doubt, check a dictionary to be sure.

**Punctuation**

This section will provide useful information on Standard American punctuation: its usage, pitfalls, etc.

**Fragments**

By definition, a fragment is a group of words that is punctuated like a sentence, but that lacks either a subject or a verb. For example: "Full five year warranty and free oil changes!" People use fragments like this in advertisements all the time, but when you are writing for an academic audience, which is far less forgiving of purposeful fragments, your readers may assume that you just don't know the sentence is a fragment. They may conclude that if you got that wrong, you might be wrong about your content too.

So, how can you do find fragments in your own writing? First, find the main verb. Then, find the subject for that verb.

You could correct the example sentence in the following way:

* **Original:** Full five year warranty and free oil changes!
* **Add verb:** Receive a full five year warranty and free oil changes!
* **Add subject and verb:** New customers receive a full five year warranty and free oil changes!

Built-in grammar-checkers are fairly good at spotting fragments, but occasionally go overboard and mark a sentence as a fragment when it is not. Use your own judgment and read each one independently while asking the questions provided above.

**Subject-Verb Agreement**

Below are some examples of errors with subject/verb agreement. Take some time and see if you can figure out what the error is in these sentences.

**Original:** The dog need to go on a walk.

**Revised**: The dog needs to go on a walk.

--The subject in the original sentence (dog) is singular. The verb (need) is plural. The verb needs to be changed from plural to singular form in order to agree with the subject.

**Original:** Chris and Molly goes for walks often in the evening.

**Revised:** Chris and Molly go for walks often in the evening.

--In this case the verb started out as a singular form. It needed to be changed to plural to fit with Chris and Molly (plural subject).

A quick way to check for subject/verb agreement is to circle the verb and underline the subject of each sentence. Make sure that if the subject is plural, you use a plural form of the verb. If you can not identify subjects and verbs this method will not be practical, and you should seek guidance online, at your school's writing center, or from an instructor first.

One last source for finding tips on correcting common errors is online tutors and workshops. Use internet searches to help you with anything you might be struggling with!

**More**

If it feels like you keep repeating the same words throughout your writing, pull out a thesaurus for ideas on different, more creative choices. A thesaurus can add just enough color and depth to a piece that otherwise seems mundane. Be careful, though, that the word you substitute has the intended meaning. Thesauruses provide words with similar meanings, not identical meanings--so if you are unsure look up the new word in the dictionary!

**Proof**

**reading with a Word Processor**

There are many word processing programs available, and probably the most popular and most commonly used one so far is Microsoft Word. However, with the advent of Microsoft Vista and the lack of easy back-compatibility between new Word and even past versions of Word (including Word from Office 2003), that may change and open source alternatives such as [Open Office](http://openoffice.org/) may gain popularity. That issue aside, one thing all word processors have in common is this: although a word processor is a great tool for writing and includes many special functions that can help a student check for errors such as spelling, punctuation, grammar, repeated words, formatting, and so on, it is not a perfect solution for all problems. When students write, they should be especially aware of the errors the software does not find. This can be a real problem when an assignment is graded for all aspects of the writing process. One of the biggest mistakes a student can make is thinking, "No problem, my word processor will catch all the mistakes for me."

There is no computer program written that can look at every word in context. As great as word processing software is, compared to the human mind it is still extremely limited when it comes to processing language. Even the simple task of spell-checking using a spell-checker tool is not error-free. Although it can find misspelled or unrecognized words, it cannot always differentiate between homonyms. For example, it does not always distinguish between the words *to*, *too*, or *two*. Another problem can arise if your word processor is not set up to correct a certain error. For instance, many spell-checkers are set by default to disregard words in all capital letters because many people do not want it to spell check acronyms. In this case, the word PROOFREEDING would not be caught as a misspelled word because it is in all capital letters.

Despite their many limitations, spelling and grammar-checkers, while not perfect, do help find common errors. However, the best tool that you can use to spot errors is your own eye. Spend the time to look over your writing carefully to make an honest attempt at turning in that elusive error-free paper, AKA by editors as *clean copy.*

**Proofreading Examples**

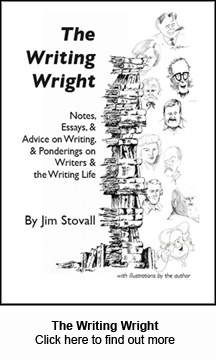
In the earlier section about proofreading using a word processor, it was mentioned that although software can correct spelling errors or alert you to unrecognized words, it cannot distinguish between words that sound alike (homonyms). Take a look at the examples containing misspelled words below and see if you can find the wrong word in each sentence. Although there are no spelling mistakes, each sentence does contain a mistake in word usage.

1. What will today's students listen to when they are in their 40s? Is disco music in there future as well?
2. Coach Thompson's team won ten consecutive Big Twelve Conference crowns, and tied the NCAA record with nine consecutive NCAA champion from 1978-1986.
3. Life experience sometimes plays an important roll in how and what a student may write about.
4. During the parade, they band members marched in unison.
5. Do you think computers have changed are everyday life?
6. The store at the end of the block does not except checks any longer.
7. One study showed that of the countries 250 million people, almost 10% still smoke.
8. As evidence has shone, the crime rate in the city has dropped in the last decade.
9. If writing is such an important part of the school curriculum, than why are so many students having problems with the essay assignment.
10. I was raised in a home were rock and roll music was not allowed.

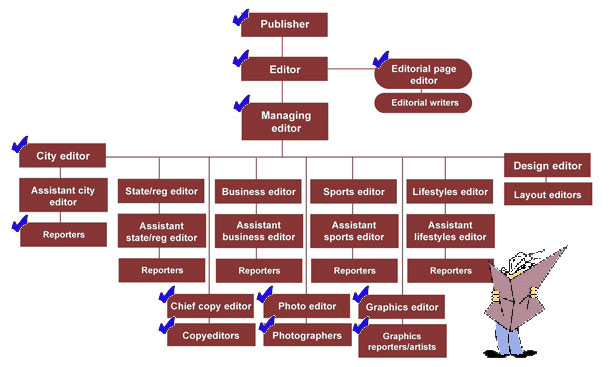
By understanding that proofreading requires a slow, deliberate analysis of what you have written, you will be able to recognize the trouble with the sentences above, and be better prepared to recognize the same type of problems in the future.

**Corrections and commentary for the above examples**

1. What will today's students listen to when they are in their 40s? Is disco music in **their** future as well? *"There" should be "their" because the second form shows possession. It is their future because it belongs to them.*
2. Coach Thompson's team won ten consecutive Big Twelve Conference crowns, and tied the NCAA record with nine consecutive NCAA **championships** from 1978-1986. "champion" should be "championships" because champions win championships. The former refers to the players, the latter to the titles they hold.
3. Life experience sometimes plays an important **role** in how and what a student may write about. *"Roll" should be "role." The first "roll" refers to the verb roll or the rolls you eat at Thanksgiving, someone's role is the part they play in something.*
4. During the parade, **the** band members marched in unison. *"They" should be "the," and is a common typo--the type that suggests sloppiness on the part of the writer, nonetheless.*
5. Do you think computers have changed **our** everyday life? *"Are" should be "our." Although some people pronounce them alike, "are" is a verb (a form of be) while "our" shows the possession of a group. (People are busy during the holidays. Our family still manages to get together.)*
6. The store at the end of the block does not **accept** checks any longer. *"except" should be "accept." "Except" forms the base for the word "exception" and shares a similar meaning; "accept" forms the base for the word "acceptance" and shares a similar meaning.*
7. One study showed that of the **country's** 250 million people, almost 10% still smoke. *"Countries" should be "country's." "Countries" is the plural form (i.e., more than one country); "country's" is the plural form and shows that something belongs to the country.*
8. As evidence has **shown**, the crime rate in the city has dropped in the last decade. *"shone" should be "shown." "Shone" is a form of the verb "shine," while "shown" is a form of the verb "show."*
9. If writing is such an important part of the school curriculum, **then** why are so many students having problems with the essay assignment? *"Than" should be "then." "Than" shows relationship when comparing two things, while "then" shows a time relationship. Ex: First I went to the store. Then, I went home.*
10. I was raised in a home **where** rock and roll music was not allowed. *"Were" should be "where." Were is a form of the verb "be," while "where" indicates a location or speech.*

* [](http://www.jprof.com/writingwright/default.html)
* **Newspaper organizational chart  
  (interactive)**

The newspaper organizational chart below is interactive. Click on the positions with the blue checks and a new window will pop up giving information about that position.



**Writing**

http://www.jprof.com/images/redcheck.jpg[Inverted pyramid news story checklist](http://www.jprof.com/writing/invertedpyramidchecklist.html)  
  
http://www.jprof.com/images/redcheck.jpg[Quotations about writing and journalism](http://www.jprof.com/writing/quotations.html)  
  
http://www.jprof.com/images/redcheck.jpg[Principles of good writing (HTML)](http://www.jprof.com/writing/writingprinciples.html) http://www.jprof.com/images/bluecheck.jpg[(PDF version)](http://www.jprof.com/writing/writingprinciples.pdf)  
  
Journalistic writing is formal, structured and demanding. The presentation of information -- accurate information in an accurate context -- is the main goal of writing, rather than the presentation and development of an individual writer's style.  
  
All media writing attempts to present information accurately, precisely, clearly and efficiently. Meeting those goals are the main things involved in learning to write for the media.

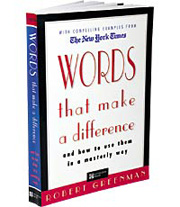
**Notes**  
  
**Tributes to a coach.** Not a football, though it is that time of year. A writing coach. [Don Murray](http://www.legacy.com/GB/GuestbookView.aspx?PersonId=20504527), a man whose work and ideas influenced many of us in the business of writing and teaching writing, passed away Dec. 30. Writing gurus [Roy Peter Clark](http://www.poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=115925) and [Chip Scanlon](http://www.poynter.org/) at the Poynter Institute have written fitting tributes to the man they knew personally and the one who talked and taught writing for all of his professional life. (There is a lot more about Murray on the Poynter website.) Murray won a Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing in the 1950s -- the youngest ever to do so -- but he didn't let that stop him from a long and prolific career as a magazine journalist, newspaper columnist, fiction writer, and university professor. His idea about the five steps of the writing process have been referenced by [JPROF here](http://www.jprof.com/writing/writing.html#murray). The world could do with a few more like him. (Posted Jan. 2, 2007)  
  
**The Iraq war is like . . . a comma.** Once again, commas are in the news. Well, make that once in a blue moon. In a speech the other day, George W. Bush said that eventually the war in Iraq would be seen as "just a comma" in the history books. He didn't offer any explanation for what he meant, and his detractors have pounced, claiming that he is trivializing a war that he began and that has cost the lives of more than 2,500 soldiers. (Here is the [Washington Post story](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/04/AR2006100401707.html) on all of this.) I'm not sure what he meant either, but as a card-carrying grammarian, I'm pretty sure that commas are important -- probably more important than Bush or his detractors seem to think. (Posted Oct. 5, 2006)  
  
**Redundancies in the air.** If you're a collector in the word game (as I am), keeping your redundancy box full is a fairly easy matter. All you have to do is pay attention occasionally. That's what I was doing when I was driving along Sunday, listening to story on National Public Radio. The story was on the [opening of the new Supreme Court term](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6175813). The anchor was interviewing a law professor about the various cases the court would be hearing this year. At one point in the interview, the anchor -- in response to something the prof had said -- cut in with "Well, that's the **key central** point, isn't it?" The law professor, who may find redundancies the elixir of life, repeated the interviewer's words. "Yes, that's the **key central** point," she said and continued with her comment. I hope that both of these intelligent people have some regrets. Meanwhile, I have a new redundancy for my collection. (Posted Oct. 3, 2006)  
  
**Today's Word on Journalism.** "In order to enjoy the inestimable benefits that the liberty of the press ensures, it is necessary to submit to the inevitable evils that it creates."  
--**Alexis de Tocqueville,** French commentator on the American experiment, 1835  
  
That quotation comes from Ted Pease's [**Today's Word on Journalism**](http://www.hardnewscafe.usu.edu), a daily email that contains a quotation about some aspect of journalism. Ted is [a professor at Utah State](http://www.usu.edu/journalism/faculty/pease/) and has a world-class sense of humor, particularly when he directs it at himself. His email is always a delight to read. You can subscribe by sending a "subscribe" message to Ted at [tpease@cc.usu.edu](mailto:tpease@cc.usu.edu). (The drawing to the right is de Tocqueville, not Ted.) More quotations about journalism -- many of them coming from Ted -- can be found at [this page on JPROF](http://www.jprof.com/writing/quotations.html). (Posted Sept. 7, 2006)  
  
**An expensive comma.** Commas don't look like they should should be very expensive, but this one in a strategic place in a contract is going to cost a Canadia company about $2 million. [***More***](http://www.jprof.com/writing/expensivecomma.html) (Posted Aug. 10, 2006)  
  
**Changing quotes.** One of the continuing practical problems that arises often in the nation's newsrooms is how to handle direct quotations. Sometimes they contain profanity. Sometimes they don't make sense, but they are said by someone important in the story, and reporters and editors must consider using them anyway. Sometimes they sound one way said aloud and appear to mean something different when in print. And sometimes they are spoken by people who are not used to being quoted by the news media, and they have language that is not normally found in a news story. Such as the case with the quotes "They was good friends" and "They killed my young'un for slam nothing." Reporters and editors at the Raleigh News and Observer struggled with those, and their struggles resulted in [an interesting column by the newspaper's public editor.](http://www.newsobserver.com/576/story/467952.html) *(Posted Aug. 8, 2006)*  
  
**Student writing skills -- worse than ever?** Most of us who teach writing at a collegiate level believe that student writing skills have deteriorated. But most of us have as evidence only the writing we encounter (pretty strong) and the complaints of our colleagues (pretty weak). Lawrence Musgrove, an English prof at St. Xavier in Chicago, has stirred up [a debate on InsideHigherEd.com](http://insidehighered.com/views/2006/07/11/musgrove) with an article that says the empirical evidence to show that student writing skills have deteriorated doesn't exist. Students are making about as many writing errors as they always have. But there are many who disagree or have something to add to Musgrove's analysis. *(Posted July 13, 2006)*  
  
**Confidential sources, New York Times style.** Bryon Calume, public editor of the New York times, devotes [his column this week](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/20/opinion/20publiceditor.html?n=Top%2fOpinion%2fThe%20Public%20Editor) to assessing the new rules at the times for using confidential sources. Two major changes have occurred since Bill Keller took over as executive editor. One is that an editor must know (and approve) the identity of the person to whom confidentiality is granted. The second is that readers should be told why the source as requested confidentiality. This is a good policy for openness, but it can also lead to some awkward writing. It has given rise to some phrasing such as "a senior White House official who spoke on condition of anonymity because most staff members are not authorized to speak about the vacancy" and "two Pentagon officials who have worked on the project and were granted anonymity so they would describe the changes before an official announcement expected later this week." Sometimes, as readers have pointed out to Calume, the reasons given by the Times reporters in the story are undercut by the information itself. Still, despite its awkwardness, the Times is trying to be more transparent for its readers, and other news organizations should follow its lead (as they inevitably will). *(Posted Nov. 22, 2005)*  
  
**Judge Roberts, grammarian.** He may be a conservative ideologue or a moderate (or even a liberal!) in right-wing clothing, but U.S. Supreme Court nominee John Roberts has been outed as ***gramarian***. An article in the New York Times this week ([In Re Grammar, Roberts's Stance is Crystal Clear](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/29/politics/politicsspecial1/29grammar.html?oref=login)) says that after a review of thousands of pages of Roberts' briefs and memos, one thing is certain: he is a precise user of the language and demands the same precision of others. The article describes his obsession as wryly humorous and occasionally sarcastic. Grammarians everywhere (conservative, moderate and liberal) can take comfort. [***More***](http://www.jprof.com/writing/judgeroberts-language.html) *(Posted Sept. 1, 2005)*  
  
**Changing context: Burn, baby, burn!** The 1960s seem to be always with us. Rarely do you hear or see a television ad that doesn't have some sixties rock hit as its theme or background music. Now there's going to be a hot sauce that uses a phrase that was anything but benign in that decade: Burn, baby, burn. For those of us who lived through the sixties, the phrase conjures up images of Watts, Detroit and a dozen other places whose conflagrations had deep political meanings. Leonard Pitts, a Pulitzer Prize winning columnist for the Miami Herald, has written [an elegant piece](http://www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/living/columnists/leonard_pitts/12327869.htm) about the way the context of this phrase has changed.

Your first thought is to wonder what's next. Power to the People Electric Company? Off the Pig pork rinds?  
  
Your second thought is to marvel at how that which was once dangerous and intimidating has become safe and unthreatening enough to sit on a supermarket shelf. Maybe you remember the title of that old Doobie Brothers album: *What Were Once Vices Are Now Habits.* To that you can now add a corollary: What were once threats are now marketing slogans.

*(Posted Aug. 14, 2005)*  
  
**Invisible writing.** One of the best mystery novelists around today is William G. Tapply, creator of the Brady Coyne mystery series. Tapply's novels live up to the cover blurbs -- well-formed characters, tightly woven plots and elegant writing. Tapply practices what many of us who teach writing often preach, and he gives voice to some of those practices in an [essay on his web site](http://williamgtapply.com/iw.html) called "Invisible Writing." The essay tells the story of what Tapply learned from his father -- also an excellent writer -- when he was beginning his craft. The essay emphasizes two major points I make with my students: pay attention to verbs (see [below](http://www.jprof.com/writing/writing.html#verbs)) and try to make your writing invisible to the reader. The term I use for the second point is "modesty." A good writer should try to put the content in the foreground and the writer in the background. Tapply's essay and his novels are well worth reading. *(Posted Aug. 13, 2005)*  
**Update:** Tapply has emailed saying that an updated version of his essay will be published in an upcoming issue of [The Writer](http://www.writermag.com) magazine, which is also a great resources for writers and teachers of writing. *(Posted Aug. 14, 2005)*  
  
**Expensive misspelling.** Tell your students (as you undoubtedly do) that they need to spell correctly and that they should check their spelling. Not doing so can turn out to be an expensive proposition. That's what the folks in Livermore, Calif., found out in 2004 when they spent $40,000 for a mosaic for their new library. The artwork contained 175 words, many of them names of writers, scientists and artists. Some 11 of those words were misspelled. They included Shakespeare (Shakespere), Einstein (Eistein), and Gauguin (Gaugan). The Miami artist who executed the work at first claimed artistic license (maybe some of your students have used the same excuse) but later said she would fix the problem words. Unfortunately, the city of Livermore is having to pay her $6,000 plus expenses to do that. California law requires that public artwork cannot be changed without the consent of the artist. Some people are blaming city and library officials as well as the artist, saying they should have checked the spelling before approving the artwork. You can read more about this in the news stories of the [San Francisco Chronicle](http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2005/08/09/BAspelling09.DTL) and the [Contra Costa Times](http://www.contracostatimes.com/mld/cctimes/news/12337964.htm). *(Posted Aug. 10, 2005)*  
  
**Idea. Collect. Focus. Draft. Clarify**. Roy Peter Clark, one of the Poynter Institute's writing gurus, has done it again. He has given us [another excellent article about writing](http://poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=79244). This one concerns the writing process itself, and he begins with Donald Murray's five-word outline of what writing is: idea, collect, focus, draft, clarify. This simple model universalizes the process, whether the writing is for the annual report of a stock brokerage company or the most compelling piece of journalism. A writer begins with the idea (often, in a journalist's case, the assignment); collects the information necessary to support the idea (reports); at some point decides what the writing is to be about; writes the piece; and then edits it. Clark has his own revision and expansion of Murray's outline, but this is a good way to begin thinking about the writing process. Sometimes students are mystified by what writing is; this outline might help them clarify it.  
http://www.jprof.com/images/writingprocess.jpg  
*(Posted April 16, 2005)*

**Remembering "Andy" White.** Roger Angell is familiar to many of us as the writer of some great books about baseball. He writes with insight and grace, and for those of us who love the game, he had always increased our pleasure. His day job is that he is a writer for the New Yorker magazine. He is also the stepson of E.B. White, and in this week’s New Yorker – the magazine's 80th anniversary edition – Angell has written [a gentle remembrance](http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/?050214fa_fact) of the man he knew as “Andy. ([More](http://www.jprof.com/writing/ebwhite.html)) *(Posted Feb. 18, 2005)*  
  
**A Saturday thought**. The passing of Arthur Miller this week is a sad moment for American letters. Miller devoted himself to his craft – writing plays. Although he wrote in other formats, writing drama meant for performance captured his mind and heart even as a teenager. As with all writers, however, he had doubts. ([More](http://www.jprof.com/writing/arthurmiller.html)) *(Posted Feb. 13, 2005)*  
  
**Writing with verbs.** Most good writing teachers stress the power and importance of verbs – often to skeptical students. Verbs are the engines of the language and have far more descriptive power than adjectives or adverbs. That’s where the skepticism comes in. Students interested in writing develop a belief that using good adjectives and adverbs will enhance their writing. Verbs are simply aids in the process. Here’s an exercise that you can do with your students that might turn their thinking around.

This exercise only a takes a few minutes and can be a lot of fun. [(More)](http://www.jprof.com/instructors/writingwithverbs.html)  
  
**Note:** Roy Peter Clark has a good article on the Poynter web site about [writing with verbs](http://poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=62588). *(Posted Feb. 9, 2005)*

**Words That Make a Difference.** [[](http://www.levenger.com/PAGETEMPLATES/PRODUCT/PRODIDPG.ASP?Params=category=186|level=3|pageid=137|link=TXT)](http://www.levenger.com/PAGETEMPLATES/PRODUCT/PRODIDPG.ASP?Params=category=186%7Clevel=3%7Cpageid=137%7Clink=TXT)Loving the language is no sin, particularly in these days of language abuse. Those of us who do love the language need to feed our habits occasionally, and *Words That Make a Difference* will certainly do that. This is a fascinating book about words. Robert Greeman, the author, has collected words that are rich in meaning and passages from the New York Times that demonstrate their use. Every page or so, Greeman chimes in with his own commentary about the origins and usage of a particular word. You will open this book, start flipping through the pages and then find you have spent a hour or so in Greeman's world of words. It's a good journey. Once you get your copy, you'll probably want to buy another for a friend of like mind. The book is only available through [Levenger's](http://www.levenger.com/PAGETEMPLATES/PRODUCT/PRODIDPG.ASP?Params=category=186%7Clevel=3%7Cpageid=137%7Clink=TXT). (There is, I'm told, a sequel on the way.) (Posted *Feb. 7, 2005*)  
  
**Rules for using commas.** Ever wish you had a single sheet with all the basic rules for using commas on it? You could hand that to your students and say something like, "Here, learn this. We'll have a test next week. You won't ever have an excuse for misusing a comma again." Well, your dream has been fulfilled. This site offers a [single-sheet PDF file](http://www.jprof.com/writing/Rulesforusingcommas.pdf) that contains all the basic rules for using a comma -- along with examples for each. The same material is also available on an [HTML page](http://www.jprof.com/writing/rulesforusingcommas.html). And in the [quiz center,](http://www.jprof.com/courses/quizcenter/quizcenter.html) there are a couple of comma quizzes you can use to help your students learn the rules.  
  
**Grammar terms and rules.** Just as any competent artisan knows the tools of his or her trade, the professional writer should know the basics of the English language. That includes knowing the terms of grammar (verbal, antecedent, etc.) as well as the rules. How is the writer to avoid a run-on sentence if he or she doesn't know what it is? To learn these things, students must do the ditch digging of the intellectual process: repeated study and memorization. This site contains a thorough (but not overly long) [list of terms and rules](http://www.jprof.com/writing/grammarterms.html) for using the language that the professional writer should know. A set of multiple-choice tests based on this glossary is available for the author to teachers. (To obtain that, email Jim Stovall at [jstovall@jprof.com](mailto:jstovall@jprof.com).) The site also has an [extensive primer on grammar, spelling, punctuation and diction](http://www.jprof.com/writing/editing/gspdguide.html) in [the editing section](http://www.jprof.com/writing/editing/editing.html). (*Posted Jan. 7, 2005*)  
  
**Writing obits.** [**[](http://www.jprof.com/writing/reporting/Obithandout.pdf)**](http://www.jprof.com/writing/reporting/Obithandout.pdf)For generations, the journalism culture demanded that young reporters cut their teeth on obituary stories – “writing obits,” we would say. The thinking was that obituaries were easy to write and possibly not very interesting or important. Today, in many newspapers (except for the larger ones), the obit story has been relegated to a classified advertisement. But writing obits is important work. It always has been. Bert Barnes spent 20 years at the Washington Post writing obituaries before retiring in March 2004.  He has written an [article](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A41579-2005Jan1.html) for the Post about his experiences on the obit desk. In it he says:

I loved that work. It taught me that even in the monotony of the daily grind, life could be funny and beautiful, surprising and strange. Death is no big deal if you don't love life. I only wish I could have met more of the people I wrote about.

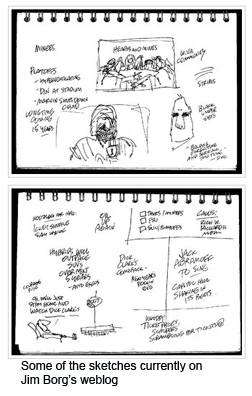
One of the first exercises I had in a beginning news writing class in college was to write my own obituary. All of us in the class had to do that, and we had a lot of fun with it. I remember trying to figure out who the pallbearers would be. I still think that’s a good assignment for a beginning student because they have all the information available without having to interview anyone or look anything up. For an example of an obituary story, look on page 186-187 of ***Journalism: Who, What, When, Where, Why and How***.  
  
The standard parts of an obituary story are explained more fully in a JPROF handout, available on this site as a [HTML file](http://www.jprof.com/writing/reporting/obitstories.html) or as a [PDF file](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A41579-2005Jan1.html). Either of these can be downloaded and duplicated for classroom use. (*Posted Jan. 4, 2004*)

**Clichés.** One of the most dangerous traps a writer can fall into -- especially a beginning writer -- is the use of clichés. Clichés are overused expressions that have lost their freshness and vitality. Chances are, if you hear a new expression more than once among your friends, it has already reached the status of a cliché -- and it should be avoided ***like the plague*** (!! CLICHE ALERT!!). We've included a [list of clichés](http://www.jprof.com/writing/cliches.html) on this web site that should be avoided, but the list is not complete. You can probably add to it yourself.  
  
**Simple words.** A lot of people don't believe this: ***Simple words are the most powerful and most effective words you can use.*** If you want to get your message across to a reader (or a listener), express yourself in the simplest way possible. Many people believe the opposite. They think the more elaborate and complex the words, the more effective the message. Here's a [short essay](http://www.jprof.com/writing/simplewords.html) on the topic.  
  
**Local stylebooks.** Almost all publications have local stylebooks. These books (or guides – sometimes they are only a few pages long) deal with questions that will not be answered by the AP stylebook. For instance, how do you refer to the name of your institution on first reference (Maplehurst University) and second reference (the University – capitalized)? Do you use “Dr.” to refer to people with a Ph.D. degree? (The AP stylebook says you should not, but your publication may want to do that.) Local stylebooks help a publication continue the quest for consistency and discipline in writing. They may also reflect the particular situation at your college or school. Here is a [**guide**](http://www.jprof.com/writing/localstylebook.html) to beginning the development of a local stylebook.  
  
**The verb "said."** In journalistic writing, there is no good substitute for the verb "said." Still, beginning students are sometimes self-conscious about using "said" so much in their writing, and they try to find substitutes. The problem with a substitute is that they are laden with added meanings that the writer may not want to include. For instance, a writer might try to use "claimed" instead of "said." Claimed implies doubt -- as if to say, he "claimed" he did it, but we're not sure. Be care about using verbs of attribution; they may say more than you want to say. Stick with the verb "said." It's simple and straightforward, and you won't have to carry any extra baggage by adding to its meaning. (There's more on this site about [verbs of attribution](http://www.jprof.com/writing/verbs.html).)

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|  | |  |  | **Editing** | | | | | | | | | | |  | |  |
|  | **Resources**  http://www.jprof.com/images/redcheck.jpg[Editor dilemmas (exercise)](http://www.jprof.com/editing/editordilemmas.html)  http://www.jprof.com/images/redcheck.jpg[Grammar, Spelling, Punctuation and Diction study guide](http://www.jprof.com/editing/gspdguide.html)  http://www.jprof.com/images/redcheck.jpg[Important dates](http://www.jprof.com/editing/dates.html)  http://www.jprof.com/images/redcheck.jpgTime and place crossword puzzle 1 ([HTML](http://www.jprof.com/editing/time-place-crwd-1.html)) ([PDF](http://www.jprof.com/editing/time-place-crwd-1.pdf))  http://www.jprof.com/images/redcheck.jpgTime and place crossword puzzle 2 ([HTML](http://www.jprof.com/editing/time-place-crwd-2.html)) ([PDF](http://www.jprof.com/editing/time-place-crwd-2.pdf))  http://www.jprof.com/images/redcheck.jpg[Mark Twain: Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses](http://www.jprof.com/editing/twainoncooper.html) (essay)  Mastery of the language -- from the rules of grammar and punctuation to the nuances of meaning -- is the basic skill necessary for good copyediting and headline writing. Copyediting is more than just fixing the mistakes in a story, however. A copyeditor must have the courage to decide when a story is incorrect or when it has the wrong emphasis, and he or she must take on the responsibility of putting it right.  Good copyediting is indispensible to any publication, and good copyeditors are extremely valuable people to have around. They can lift the quality of the publication in ways that no other journalists can match.  **Notes**  **Discussion notes: Editing for the web.** Do you need to talk with your editing students about the special considerations of editing for the web? Do you need to get your online journalism students up to speed as editors? JPROF.com has put together some discussion notes that you can use to introduce your editors to some of the things they will need to thing about in editing for the web, things such as linking, wordiness, chunking, pull quotes and other devices. [***More***](http://www.jprof.com/editing/editingfortheweb-discussion.html). (Posted Feb. 7, 2007)   **Editing for the web.** The web is a different medium. Then why do we keep seeing so much shovelware -- articles that were written for print -- on news web sites. One reason, of course, is that news organizations (particularly newspapers) do not invest in enough people who can change print stories into web-friendly packages. Another is that editors do not understand the needs or possibilities of the web. To get my students shifted from print to the web, I have developed [this example](http://www.jprof.com/courses/jem422/editingassign01a.html) of how a print story can be turned into a web story. (Posted Sept. 14, 2006)  **The death of the clever headline?** Headline writing is one of the most difficult tasks in journalism and certainly one of the most difficult things to teach for the journalism professor. Now -- as if accuracy, clarity and a bit of wite weren't enough -- there is a new challenge: search engines. Steve Lohr [writes this week in the New York Times](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/09/weekinreview/09lohr.html?ex=1302235200&en=86fd20f27aa1d645&ei=5090&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss) about how news organizations are tweaking headlines in an effort to get their links picked by Google and its kin and thus drawing readers to the site. If the Google consideration becomes a major one, we could see yet another shift in the practice of journalism. [***More***](http://www.jprof.com/editing/cleverheadlines.html) *(Posted April 14, 2006)* **Update:** But worse than the boring headline is the useless one. Here is [Steffen Fjaervik's take on this](http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=31&aid=99707).*(Posted April 14, 2006)* **Discussion notes: Responsibilities of the editor.** Getting your editing students in the right frame of mind to become editors is a challenge for any editing teacher. JPROF.com has a set of [discussion notes](http://www.jprof.com/editing/responsibilitiesoftheeditor.html) that contain many of the points you might want to make with your students at the beginning of an editing class. Above all, students should be taught that editors are the people who make decisions about the entire publication or web site, and they have to take responsibility for what is included in the publication. A reporter's mistake becomes their mistake if they do not take steps to correct it. [***More***](http://www.jprof.com/editing/responsibilitiesoftheeditor.html)  **Expensive misspelling.** Tell your students (as you undoubtedly do) that they need to spell correctly and that they should check their spelling. Not doing so can turn out to be an expensive proposition. That's what the folks in Livermore, Calif., found out in 2004 when they spent $40,000 for a mosaic for their new library. The artwork contained 175 words, many of them names of writers, scientists and artists. Some 11 of those words were misspelled. They included Shakespeare (Shakespere), Einstein (Eistein), and Gauguin (Gaugan). The Miami artist who executed the work at first claimed artistic license (maybe some of your students have used the same excuse) but later said she would fix the problem words. Unfortunately, the city of Livermore is having to pay her $6,000 plus expenses to do that. California law requires that public artwork cannot be changed without the consent of the artist. Some people are blaming city and library officials as well as the artist, saying they should have checked the spelling before approving the artwork. You can read more about this in the news stories of the [San Francisco Chronicle](http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2005/08/09/BAspelling09.DTL) and the [Contra Costa Times](http://www.contracostatimes.com/mld/cctimes/news/12337964.htm). *(Posted Aug. 10, 2005)*  **FDR, the editor.** http://www.jprof.com/images/08infamy2.gifFranklin Roosevelt, who died in office 60 years ago this week, was a notorious and exacting editor. Nowhere is this more apparent than in his handling of the speech he gave to Congress on Dec. 8, 1941, the day after Pearl Harbor was bombed. Roosevelt took the draft of the speech and by careful editing made it into one of the most famous speeches in American history. (The History Channel has produced a special program on Roosevelt's presidency and along with it a [web site](http://www.historychannel.com/fdr/) with many resources.) [***More***](http://www.jprof.com/editing/fdreditor.html) *(Posted April 17, 2005)*  **Attacking wordiness.** Most of the editing students I have taught over the last three decades share this trait: they are reluctant to change anything in an editing exercise, even when it is obviously wrong. Getting them to where they will correct grammar, spelling and style errors in the first step. But to be good editors, of course, they must go far beyond this. They must learn to recognize and attack wordiness – the heart disease of good writing. Here are some [lecture/discussion notes](http://www.jprof.com/editing/attackingwordiness.html) about what to tell editing students about wordiness – how to recognize the symptoms and cure the disease. *(Posted Feb. 10, 2005)*  **Notes on accuracy.** The first lesson that beginning journalism students should learn is they are obligated to present accurate information to their audience. Many of the procedures of journalism are directed toward achieving accuracy. Editing students need to be reminded of this goal, too. It is the editor's job to ensure accuracy. This web site contains [a set lecture/discussion notes](http://www.jprof.com/editing/notesonaccuracy.html) that I use for my editing class when talking with them about accuracy and how to achieve it.  **An additional note:** John Early McIntyre, assistant managing editor for the copydesk at the Baltimore Sun, has an [excellent piece](http://www.poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=77927) on the Poynter web site about the importance of editing. In it, he cites a 2003 conference on [Editing for the Future](http://www.scripps.ohiou.edu/news/editfuture/) held at the First Amendment Center in Nashville. The web site for the conference contains many resources for those interested in editing, including [a session devoted to accuracy](http://www.scripps.ohiou.edu/news/editfuture/07_Holt/story.htm). That session was led by Margaret Holt, customer service editor of the Chicago Tribune. During her presentation (which can be viewed on video at the site), she told the story of the time when the Tribune got serious about guarding against inaccuracies:  Since 1992 the Chicago Tribune has hired a proofreader to do an errors-per-page annual report, so the newsroom can track errors from year to year. "We were abysmal starting out," she said. "I think we were as high as 4.82 errors per page."  However, the Tribune's accuracy program kicked into high gear in 1995 when it suffered an accuracy "meltdown." A senior writer misidentified a top Tribune executive in an obituary of a beloved editor. That executive was "not happy," Holt said. The obit was published on a Saturday, and by Monday, the executive ordered the Tribune to establish an error policy.  *(Posted Feb. 9, 2005)*  **Editor dilemmas.** George Daniels, my friend and colleague at the University of Alabama, has developed [an excellent exercise](http://www.jprof.com/editing/editordilemmas.html) on some of the management dilemmas that editors face in dealing with reporters. The exercise is based on some of the guidelines that editors should use in building their relationships with reporters that are outlined in Chapter 12 of [***Journalism: Who, What, When, Where, Why and How***](http://www.jprof.com/books/jn5w/jn5w.html). These dilemmas are designed to get students to think about the dual roles editors have as keepers of the journalistic culture and as managers of people. (Posted *Feb. 2, 2005*)  **Twain takes aim.**http://www.jprof.com/images/MarkTwain.jpg In a famous 1895 essay, Mark Twain delivered a stinging critique of one of America’s 19th century literary icons, James Fennimore Cooper. Twain was very much a modern writer, advocating active, descriptive verbs and short rather than long words. [His essay](http://www.jprof.com/editing/twainoncooper.html) is worth reading, not necessarily for what it says about Cooper, but for what it says about writing itself.  In a defense of Cooper, Lance Schachterle and Kent Lyungquist say Twain manipulated the evidence against Cooper and was ultimately unfair to him.  The eighteen rules for effective fiction that Twain claims Cooper habitually violated fall under three heads: he could not formulate a plot that got anywhere; his characterization was vapid, inert, or unconvincing; and his diction was  wretched. Twain seeks to win the reader's assent to this view of Cooper by alternating elegant and brassy variations of his own critical judgment with illustrations apparently drawn straight from the text. Precisely by his choice of examples Twain reveals his satirical strategy. With "circumstantial evidence," Twain actually distorts what Cooper wrote and presents the illusion of conclusive proof without any real substance. By carefully manipulating Cooper's texts, willfully misreading, and sometimes fabricating evidence, Twain leaves the reader with the impression that he has polished Cooper off. By looking at Twain's treatment of plot, characterization, and especially diction in *The Deerslayer*, we can lay bare Twain's rhetorical strategy and satirical distortions.  [**Fenimore Cooper's Literary Defenses: Twain and the Text of *The Deerslayer***](http://www.jprof.com/editing/%20http:/external.oneonta.edu/cooper/articles/other/1988other-schachterle.html)**by Lance Schachterle and Kent Ljungquist  (Worcester Polytechnic Institute),** Studies in the American Renaissance, 1988.  Read [Twain’s essay](http://www.jprof.com/editing/twainoncooper.html) and see for yourself.  **Dates for the journalist.** Even if history teachers have stopped making students memorize dates, journalism teachers shouldn't. Dates are important for a full understanding of events, and students should have precise knowledge of the important events in American and world history. The [list of dates](http://www.jprof.com/editing/dates.html) on this web site, adapted from The Complete Editor, is a good place for the student to begin acquiring this knowledge. Once the students have studied this list, they will be ready to tackle the two crossword puzzles contained on this site. You can download these puzzles as HTML or PDF files. (*Posted Jan. 10, 2005*) http://www.jprof.com/images/redcheck.jpgTime and place crossword puzzle 1 ([HTML](http://www.jprof.com/editing/time-place-crwd-1.html)) ([PDF](http://www.jprof.com/editing/time-place-crwd-1.pdf)) http://www.jprof.com/images/redcheck.jpgTime and place crossword puzzle 2 ([HTML](http://www.jprof.com/editing/time-place-crwd-2.html)) ([PDF](http://www.jprof.com/editing/time-place-crwd-2.pdf))  **A key to good editing.** One of the most difficult things to teach beginning editing students is, somewhat oddly, attitude. While no one should be cocky or uncivil, a good copyeditor must have the confidence not only to spot errors but also to change the copy to make it better. That is reasonably easy to do when they are dealing with technical matters – spelling, grammar, style rules, etc. – where the rules are explicit. It is much more difficult when changing copy calls upon editors to use their judgment and to have confidence in that judgment. An editor must consider any piece of copy his or her own – must “take possession” of it, in the modern phrase. A good editor does not hesitate to see what it wrong, recognize how it should be changed and then change it.  http://www.jprof.com/images/joysofgrammar1.gif**Grammar, Spelling, Punctuation and Diction exam.** When I taught at the University of Alabama, I would give a 100-question grammar, spelling, punctuation and diction exam to beginning writing students. The test was a difficult one, but students had to make at least a 75 on the exam to pass the beginning writing course offered by the College of Communication and Information Sciences. That exam is not available on this web site, but the [study guide](http://www.jprof.com/editing/gspdguide.html) developed for it is. This is an excellent primer on the basic grammar and spelling rules and concepts that a student should know. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |  |
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|  | **Graphics journalism** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |  |
|  | Graphics journalism is a specialized form of journalism that uses graphic forms to present information. These forms often use words as well as illustration, so the graphics journalist must have the ability to write -- especially to use words efficiently.  Graphics journalism generally backs up and adds information to other reporting and writing that the publication has done. Graphics journalists usually take one part of a story -- that which lends itself to graphic presentation -- and do additional reporting so that a graphic can be developed for the story. Such reporting is very difficult because it must be precise and complete. And it must produce information that can be properly used in a graphic form.  **Notes** http://www.jprof.com/images/rochestergooglemap.jpg**GoogleMaps mania.** The ability of web site developers to put a customized GoogleMap on their web sites is creating quiet a stir these days, including a [story this week on National Public Radio](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5151938) that includes an interview with Mike Pegg, creator of a [GoogleMapsMania](http://googlemapsmania.blogspot.com/) weblog that tracks the use of GoogleMaps. The implications and possibilities of using GoogleMaps for web journalism are enormous. (Check out a GoogleMap of all the murders in Rochester, N.Y., in 2005 that was built by the folks at the [Rochester Democrat & Chronicle](http://www.rochesterdandc.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060108/NEWS01/601080316).) Still, at present, GoogleMaps is intimidating because a knowledge of javascript is required. A beacon of hope has begun to shine, however. [Mapbuilder.net](http://www.mapbuilder.net), developed by Andriy Bidochko, gives us javascript-challenged users an easier way to get our custom-built maps onto our web sites. [***More***](http://www.jprof.com/graphicsjn/googlemapsmania.html) *(Posted Jan. 14, 2006)* **Want it to last? Draw, don't write.** A [review of Clifford Connor’s ***A People's History of Science***](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/18/books/review/18weiner.html) in the New York Times this month has this observation:  A great moment in the history of science was the publication of Andreas Vesalius's anatomy book, ***De Humani Corporis Fabrica,*** in 1543. What made the book a triumph wasn't the Latin text Vesalius wrote but the 420 illustrations. He never took the trouble to name the artists he'd hired to draw them. Nobody has ever translated the whole of Vesalius's text into a modern Western language; the illustrations have stayed in print from that year to this. The review was written by Jonathan Weiner.  Illustrators, even anonymous ones, can have a great impact on their audience – and this is a prime example of just that. *(Posted Dec. 31, 2005)*  **Tips for beginners.** Students who are learning about charts and how to produce them should remember the following:  • Study charts that have been professionally produced by newspapers or news web sites. The Associated Press has a graphics department that produces many charts used by newspapers every day. Look closely at the way they are put together.  • Don’t try to put too much data in a chart. A line chart should not have more than three lines of data. A pie chart should not have more than six or seven sections at most.  • Use an explainer box to help the reader understand the chart. An explainer box is the text under the headline.  • Try to keep the idea of a chart – what you are attempting to show – as simple as possible.  **Data is plural.** The word “data” is a plural noun and should have a plural verb. The word “media” is plural also.  **Graphics reporting.** Finding the appropriate data to build a good chart is not always easy. Graphics reporters often find that the data they need are not available or are incomplete. Try to find as much statistical information as you can about the students at your college or school. Begin with the number of freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors. Who would have that information? See what you can come up with and how many different kinds of charts you can build.  **Finding maps to use.** If you are working for a publication – high school or college – you should not use maps created by MapQuest or some other professional service without specific permission from that service. To do so is a violation of copyright laws. Maps that are free from those restrictions are available from other sources, however. For national and state maps, try the [U.S. Census Bureau](http://www.census.gov/geo/www/maps/). For local maps, look on the web sites of city and county governments. University libraries and geography departments often create maps of the areas they serve, and those can often be used without permission. Before using any map, check to make sure there are no restrictions on its use. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |  |
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|  | **Design** | | | | | | | |  |
|  | **Resources**  http://www.jprof.com/images/greencheck.jpg[Tabloid dummy sheet](http://www.jprof.com/design/tabloiddummy.pdf) (PDF file)  http://www.jprof.com/images/greencheck.jpg[Full-size dummy sheet](http://www.jprof.com/design/fullsizedummy.pdf) (PDF file)   Design is an extemely important, and often highly controversial, part of journalism. Any news organization (including broadcasting) projects much of its personality and attitudes, as well as its content, through its design. People who design publictions and lay them out on a day-to-day basis must be highly skilled professionals.  **News and notes  New York Times redesign.** The New York Times has redesigned its web site, a move that is likely to draw plenty of attention and comment. There seems to be little new or innovative about the design. It gives the site a cleaner look because of its increased use of white space. What is most disappointing, however, is that the Times has clung to the old-school thinking of maintaining a "multimedia" section. The Times does excellent graphics, videos, slideshows and audio slideshows. Those items should be integrated with the other reporting that the Times does -- if for no other reason than to make things convenient for the reader. Whatever multimedia means to the reader -- and it's not at all clear -- these reporting methods should not be something separate, and it's time for journalists to shed that kind of thinking. [***More***](http://www.jprof.com/design/nytimesredesign.html) *(Posted April 3, 2006)*  **SND.**http://www.jprof.com/images/sndlogo.jpgThe Society for News Design is the leading professional organization for people interested in visual journalism. The society holds a variety of meetings and workshops throughout the year and offers many services. It is especially interested in having students join and in having student chapters form on college campuses. Visit the society's [web site](http://www.snd.org) and find out what it's all about.  **Multi-tasking in your mind.** Publication design requires the ability to think at many levels at the same time. To put together a good page, a layout editor has to consider the following simultaneously:  • elements present on a daily basis (news stories, pictures, graphics, etc.) • where these elements can best be used and how they might fit together • the general rules of good design • the specific layout requirements of the publication.  Not an easy thing to do.  **Dummy sheets.** A dummy sheet is a sheet with a grid on it and is used to draw publication layouts, such as the one you can see on page 315 (Figure 17.4) of ***Journalism: Who, What, When, Where, Why and How***. This web site contains blank dummy sheets for [tabloid](http://www.jprof.com/design/tabloiddummy.pdf) and [full size](http://www.jprof.com/design/fullsizedummy.pdf) publications. (They are in Adobe PDF files.) You may download and reproduce them if you need them for your school publication. | | | | | | |  |  |
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**Opinion**

**Inside a cartoonist's mind.** Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist Jim Borgman is giving us a fascinating peek inside the mind of the editorial cartoonist with his new weblog, [**BorgBlog**](http://frontier.cincinnati.com/blogs/borgman/). Borgman is posting not just some of his cartoons but some of his sketches and his thoughts about how particular cartoons develop. The site currently has three versions of the cartoon he drew about the West Virginia coal mining tragedy, showing how he decided on where to place the miner's wife. In addition, Borgman includes a variety of sketches, some of which turn into cartoons and some of which remain as half-formed ideas. This is a wonderful site for those of us who envy the skill and the power of the editorial cartoonist.  
[***More***](http://www.jprof.com/opinion/insideacartoonistsmind.html) *(Posted Jan. 10, 2006)*  
(Thanks to Jonathan Dube at [Cyberjournalist.net](http://www.Cyberjournalist.net) for pointing usin the the direction of Borgman's weblog.)  
  
**Changing context: Burn, baby, burn!** The 1960s seem to be always with us. Rarely do you hear or see a television ad that doesn't have some sixties rock hit as its theme or background music. Now there's going to be a hot sauce that uses a phrase that was anything but benign in that decade: Burn, baby, burn. For those of us who lived through the sixties, the phrase conjures up images of Watts, Detroit and a dozen other places whose conflagrations had deep political meanings. Leonard Pitts, a Pulitzer Prize winning columnist for the Miami Herald, has written [an elegant piece](http://www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/living/columnists/leonard_pitts/12327869.htm) about the way the context of this phrase has changed.

Your first thought is to wonder what's next. Power to the People Electric Company? Off the Pig pork rinds?  
  
Your second thought is to marvel at how that which was once dangerous and intimidating has become safe and unthreatening enough to sit on a supermarket shelf. Maybe you remember the title of that old Doobie Brothers album: *What Were Once Vices Are Now Habits.* To that you can now add a corollary: What were once threats are now marketing slogans.

*(Posted Aug. 14, 2005)*

**Not enough women.** There aren't enough women opinion writers -- or at least not enough of them make it onto the pages of America's newspapers.  
  
That's the issue, not what Susan Estrich thinks about Michael Kinsley or how he has responded to her, entertaining as all that might be.  
  
That dustup between a couple of high-profile Harvard grads has used up some ink lately, if for no other reason that its escalating nastiness. Here's the essence of it as recounted in [a Los Angeles Times article](http://www.latimes.com/news/custom/showcase/la-et-estrich11mar11.story) by James Rainey this week. Estrich is a law professor at Southern California, the campaign manager for Michael Dukakis' 1988 presidential campaign, and a syndicated columnist. Kinsley is the former editor of Slate.com, a former host of CNN's Crossfire, and currently the editorial page editor of the Los Angelese Times.  
  
And both are adults. [***More***](http://www.jprof.com/opinion/womencolumnists.html) *(Posted March 12, 2005)*  
  
**Political cartooning -- a chance for survival?** The number of political cartoonists, by one estimate, has dwindled to about 85 fulltime people. Newspapers, as usual, seem bent on cutting costs rather than delivering quality, so the local cartoonist is let go, encouraged to leave or not replaced when he or she does leave. Instead of encouraging this kind of journalism by growing their own local cartoonists, newspapers have generally viewed it as just another expense that can be eliminated. It is yet another example of newspaper short-sightedness. Still, the cartooning goes on among a determined few -- even those who don't have fulltime jobs. Mark Glaser, in [a recent article](http://www.ojr.org:80/ojr/stories/050301glaser/) posted on the Online Journalism Review, says the web may be cartoonists some hope:

*These are the worst of times and the best of times for editorial cartoonists. Newspapers have been cutting full-time editorial cartoonist jobs down to the bone, and prices paid in syndication seem to drop by the minute. But the Web has brought new business opportunities for popular cartoonists, with global distribution and the chance for self-syndication.*

Let's hope Glaser is right. Better yet, let's hope that news organizations will come to their senses and let readers enjoy a good laugh or get provoked by a good jab at their favorite politician. *(Posted March 2, 2005)*  
  
**Is television killing sports columns -- and sports columnists?** Stephen Rodrick, writing for Slate magazine, seems to think it is. In a [devastating critique](http://www.slate.com/id/2112657/) of many of the yelling heads that appear on ESPN's several talk shows, Rodrick makes a simple point: the time a sports columnist spends on television takes away from the time he or she has to write a good column -- to talk with sources, to visit lockerooms, to research information, etc. He has particularly harsh word for people such as Stephen Smith (Philadelphia Inquirer), Dan Le Batard (Miami Herald), Tony Kornheiser (Washington Post), and Woody Paige (Denver Post).  
  
Some columnists still give their first priority to writing the column -- people such as Tom Boswell of the Washington Post.

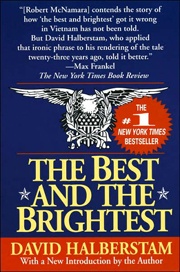
At the New York Times, where sports columnists are only rarely on television, the reported column lives on. In the first four days of 2005, columnist Selena Roberts wrote back-to-back columns that artfully skewered the seamier side of Auburn's football program using—get this—actual public documents that probably involved a trip to a courthouse or two. Rhoden also penned a thoughtful piece on USC offensive coordinator Norm Chow and racism in college football.

Rodrick's article is titled, "Unpardonable Interruptions: How Television Killed the Newspaper Sports Column." It's well worth reading. (Posted *Jan. 26, 2005*)

**Conflict of interest.** One of the basic tenets of journalistic practice is that a journalist should be independent. That is, a journalist should not work for any person or organization except the news organization that he or she represents. That tenet holds for editorialists as well as reporters. An editorial writer or columnist may express opinionated or partisan points of view, but there should always be a distance between the journalist and those who are being covered or commented upon. [Armstrong Williams](http://www.armstrongwilliams.com/ME2/Audiences/default.asp) apparently did not understand this tenet of journalist (or he did understand it and chose to ignore it), and that has landed him in hot water with his professional colleagues and one of his employers, Tribune Media Services. Williams accepted $240,000 from the Bush administration to espouse favorable opinions about Bush's No Child Left Behind educational plan. ([USA Today: Education Dept. paid commentator to promote law](http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2005-01-06-williams-whitehouse_x.htm?POE=click-refer)) He did not disclose that fact and is now facing blistering criticism from other journalists, such as the [National Association of Black Journalists](http://www.nabj.org/newsroom/news_releases/story/1018p-1629c.html). Williams has been dropped as a columnist by the Tribune Media Services, which distributes his newspaper column to many newspapers around the nation. ([TMS statement terminating its contract with Williams](http://poynter.org/forum/view_post.asp?id=8580).)(*Posted January 8, 2005*) **Update:** Williams appeared on the [Washington Post’s Live Online discussion](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A57268-2005Jan7.html%20) on Monday, Jan. 10, and took responsibility for his ethical failure: “I'm a principled columnist and commentator but yet I'm ashamed that my bad judgment has cast a black shadow on my name. Where I go in the future depends on my credibility and never violating journalistic ethical standards again. I've learned from this, the most important thing being it is far more important to maintain my integrity and ethics as a media pundit than to concern myself with generating dollars as a entrepreneur (sic).” Williams said he did not think he had done anything illegal: “Simply bad judgment that crossed a gray area of ethics. My bad judgment was an omission but I never intended to deceive or mislead anyone.” It's hard to believe that Williams did not know what he was doing when he took the money to conduct the interviews with the Secretary of Education about No Child Left Behind, but that's what he says. (*Posted Jan. 10, 2005*)

Top of Form

**Reporting**

**http://www.jprof.com/images/redcheck.jpg**[References for journalists](http://www.jprof.com/reporting/09references.html) **http://www.jprof.com/images/redcheck.jpg**[Preview stories (handout) HTML](http://www.jprof.com/reporting/previewstories.html), http://www.jprof.com/images/bluecheck.jpg[PDF](http://www.jprof.com/reporting/previewhandout.pdf) **http://www.jprof.com/images/redcheck.jpg**[Obituary stories (handout) HTML](http://www.jprof.com/reporting/obitstories.html), http://www.jprof.com/images/bluecheck.jpg[PDF](http://www.jprof.com/reporting/Obithandout.pdf)http://www.jprof.com/images/redcheck.jpg[Speech stories (handout) HTML](http://www.jprof.com/reporting/speechstories.html), http://www.jprof.com/images/bluecheck.jpg[PDF](http://www.jprof.com/reporting/speechhandout.pdf) **Notes****David Halberstam, reporter.** David Halberstam represented many things to the profession of journalism. Most of all, I think, he demonstrated that a reporter who does his job can make a difference. Halberstam was one of the first people to say that we were wrong to be in Vietnam in the early 1960s. He did this not out of ideological bent -- he had been a supporter of our efforts there -- but because he had been in country and had seen how much the situation there differed with the official version that the U.S. government was trying to propogate. Halberstam's reporting and information led him to his opinions (not the other way around). He laid all of this out in his best-selling 1973 book, **The Best and Brightest**. Even after Vietnam, Halberstam continued to be reporter. He wrote about the media, the generations, the auto industry and sports. To each of those subjects he devoted the dogged determination of a reporter trying to get the facts and understand the people involved in a story. He was doing just that when he was killed in a car accident in California earlier this week. He was on his way to interview a source for his latest book. He was 73 years old. Here are tributes and other information about Halberstam:  
• [Fresh Air interviews](http://www.npr.org/templates/rundowns/rundown.php?prgId=13) with Halberstam  
• Roy Peter Clark, [David Halberstam: Witness to War](http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=101&aid=121958), Poynter Institute  
• Jon Meacham, [The Best and the Brightest,](http://www.jprof.com/reporting/(http:/www.msnbc.msn.com/id/18289048/site/newsweek/) Newsweek  
• Henry Allen, [A Journalist for Whom There Were Not Enough Words,](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/04/24/AR2007042402512.html) Washington Post  
(Posted April 27, 2007)  
  
**The writer's life, Gay Talese style.** For decades now, readers and critics have focused on Gay Talese's writing style. In the 1960s he was a pioneer of the New Journalsim, which used fictional and literary techniques to tell his nonfiction stories. But what readers should have been focusing on was his reporting, which is meticulous, exacting and precise. Talese, [according to the New York Times](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/18/books/23mcgr.html), is about to release his memoir, A Writer's Life, which should give us some insight into his reporting methods. It will be a welcome addition to the literature of Talese and for his legion of fans.  
[***More***](http://www.jprof.com/reporting/gaytalese.html) *(Posted April 23, 2006)*  
  
**Bonds hoisted on his own Louisville slugger?** It would be a reporter's dream: Barry Bonds answering questions under oath -- with two reporters in the room. That could be one of the outcomes of the suit that San Francisco Giant Barry Bonds has filed against Mark Fainaru-Wada and Lance Williams, two San Francisco Chronicle reporters who have written a book about Bonds' use of steriods to make him baseball's all-time home run king. Chances are it won't happen because a judge is likely to dismiss the suit sometime soon. Still, it's nice to dream.  
[***More***](http://www.jprof.com/reporting/barrybonds.html) *(Posted March 26, 2006)*  
  
**The center of gravity has shifted.** The web has pretty much rendered obsolete the adage that says you should never pick a fight with a man who buys ink by the barrel and newsprint by the ton. Today there is less fear and frustration with the news media on the part of those outside the profession, and there is more willingness to take issue with the decisions of reporters and editors. The web has given those who believe they have been mistreated a forum and a voice -- and it is forcing the redefiniton of the relationship between reporter and source. [Katharine Seelye has an excellent article](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/02/business/media/02source.html?pagewanted=all) about that this week in the New York Times.  
[***More***](http://www.jprof.com/news/centerofgravity.html) *(Posted Jan. 3, 2006)*  
  
**First reporting assignment: a preview story.** It's the first week of class in your reporting class. Your students are bright and eager -- and they don't have a clue about what they are supposed to do. You want to get them into the field quickly, but you're afraid (rightly so) to unleash them on an unsuspecting campus.  
  
The solution: a preview story. It's a simple, straightforward assignment and will give them some confidence as they get into the reporting game. JPROF.com has [some thoughts](http://www.jprof.com/reporting/previewstories.html) about the preview assignment and an example for your students to follow in either [HTML](http://www.jprof.com/reporting/previewstories.html) or [PDF](http://www.jprof.com/reporting/previewhandout.pdf) form. [***More***](http://www.jprof.com/reporting/previewstories.html).  
  
**High school journalist, undercover.** David McSwane wanted to do "something cool." What he did wound up shutting the entire U.S. Army's recruiting effort down for a day. McSwane is a senior at Arvada West High School in Colorado; he's an honors student there and editor of high school newspaper, *The Westwind.* When he heard that the Army was failing to meet its recruiting goals because of the unpopularity of the war in Iraq, he decided to find out just how far the service would go to sign someone up. That's when things started to get interesting.  
[***More***](http://www.jprof.com/reporting/hsjngoesundercover.html) *(Posted May 27, 2005)*  
  
**The Numbers Guy.** Numbers are funny things -- especially for journalists. They sound so definite and authoritative. Numbers represent facts in a seemingly indisputable way. They are easy to use and easy to understand. But numbers should always be checked for **context** and **source**. One journalist who regularly examines the source and context of numbers is Carl Bailik, a Wall Street Journal reporter who writes a column called [The Numbers Guy](http://online.wsj.com/public/page/0,,2_1125,00.html). This column is one of the free features of the Wall Street Journal web site, and those interested in good reporting should check it regularly.  
[***More***](http://www.jprof.com/reporting/thenumbersguy.html) *(Posted May 25, 2005)*  
  
**Women as news sources.** Women do not make it into news stories as sources as much as men do. That is the basic finding of [a new study conducted](http://www.journalism.org/resources/research/reports/gender/default.asp) by the Project for Excellence in Journalism and funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts. The basic finding is probably not surprising, but what is impressive and important is how widespread and consistent is the tendency of journalists to use men rather than women as sources of information. The study looked at 16,000 news stories in 45 different news outlets. Researchers coded the gender of the sources quoted in the stories and found that “men are relied on as sources in the news more than twice as often as women.” This is the case despite the fact that news organizations have made efforts to get more women into the ranks of reporters and editors and women are taking more active roles in business and public life. “The numbers suggest that the representation of women as sources in the news has a significant distance to go towards reflecting their role in American society generally,” the study says. (*Posted May 24, 2005*)

**The "essentially accurate" standard.** Abraham Lincoln began the Gettysburg Address with the words, "About a century ago, the dudes that started it all . . ." Well, ok. Those weren't exactly the words, but they are "essentially accurate." That's the standard that Detroit Free Press sportswriter Mitch Albom imposed upon himself in handling direct quotations for his column. Apparently, some of the editors at the newspaper were willing to live with that standard, too. But that is not the standard that those of us who teach journalism want to pass on to our students. What we want is for our students to be **meticulous** in their pursuit of accuracy. [***More.***](http://www.jprof.com/practices/albom.html) (*Posted May 17, 2005*)  
  
**Reporting religion**. Journalists don’t have an easy time with religion. Religion and religious topics are not particularly welcomed in a newsroom. That is why years such as 2004, when religion is a big part of some of the year’s biggest stories (gay marriage, the presidential election, Mel Gibson’s movie “The Passion of Christ,” etc.) are tough for journalists. Why then are editors and news directors eliminating their religion beats or assigning untrained reporters to them? That’s the question that Julia Duin, religion reporter for the Washington Times, poses in an [excellent centerpiece article](http://poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=75431) for Poynter.org. Duin says that if religion beat reporters are hired at all, they come with little experience, and the situation does not seem to be getting better. Duin’s article contains a link to the web site for the [Religion Newswriters Association](http://www.religionwriters.com/). If you have a student interested in this area, this web site would be a good place to keep up with the latest developments. (*Posted Jan. 6, 2005*)  
**Update:** Since the posting of Duin's article, a couple of other journalists have chimed in with their thoughts, and they're worth reading too. Steve Buttry, national correspondent for the Omaha World-Herald, offers a [counterpoint](http://poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=76751) to some of Duin's ideas about improving religion coverage, and Diane Conolly [discusses her assignment](http://poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=76754) as a novice to the religion beat. Conolly is the editor for [ReligionLink.org](http://www.religionlink.org/), a excellent resouce for reporters and others interested in coverage of religion. A number of other people have posted comments about all of these articles on the Poynter site. (*Posted Jan. 12, 2005*)  
  
**[[](http://www.jprof.com/reporting/Obithandout.pdf)](http://www.jprof.com/reporting/Obithandout.pdf)Writing obits.** For generations, the journalism culture demanded that young reporters cut their teeth on obituary stories – “writing obits,” we would say. The thinking was that obituaries were easy to write and possibly not very interesting or important. Today, in many newspapers (except for the larger ones), the obit story has been relegated to a classified advertisement. But writing obits is important work. It always has been. Bert Barnes spent 20 years at the Washington Post writing obituaries before retiring in March 2004.  He has written an [article](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A41579-2005Jan1.html) for the Post about his experiences on the obit desk. In it he says:

I loved that work. It taught me that even in the monotony of the daily grind, life could be funny and beautiful, surprising and strange. Death is no big deal if you don't love life. I only wish I could have met more of the people I wrote about.

One of the first exercises I had in a beginning news writing class in college was to write my own obituary. All of us in the class had to do that, and we had a lot of fun with it. I remember trying to figure out who the pallbearers would be. I still think that’s a good assignment for a beginning student because they have all the information available without having to interview anyone or look anything up. For an example of an obituary story, look on page 186-187 of ***Journalism: Who, What, When, Where, Why and How***.  
  
The standard parts of an obituary story are explained more fully in a JPROF handout, available on this site as an [HTML file](http://www.jprof.com/reporting/obitstories.html) or as a [PDF file](http://www.jprof.com/reporting/Obithandout.pdf). Either of these can be downloaded and duplicated for classroom use.

**Context in reporting.** One of the criticisms of journalism is that reporters report events as events only, rather than giving them any context. That is, they do not relate these events to other events or information that would help a reader understand them more fully. Stephen Downes, a Canadian educator, has written a [short essay](http://www.ablongman.com/stovall1e/chap09/09context.html) on how reporters can introduce more context into their reporting.  
  
**Interviewing.** One of the skills a reporter must develop is the art of interviewing. The text pays a good deal of attention to helping students develop this skill. For more information about interviewing, start with this article, [The Art of Asking Questions](http://poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=60848) (http://poynter.org/content/content\_view.asp?id=60848) from the Poynter Institute.  
  
**Math.** Many journalists say (sometimes jokingly, sometimes not) that they got into the profession because they would not have to deal with a lot of math. For most working reporters, however, that turns out not to be the case. They have to deal with math every day. A good reporter should know how to figure a ratio, an average, a median and a percentage. Here are some web sites that will help you out:

• [NilesOnline.com](http://nilesonline.com/stats/) (http://nilesonline.com/stats/)  
• [Investigative Reporters and Editors](http://www.ire.org/education/math_test.html) (with a terrific math test: http://www.ire.org/education/math\_test.html)  
• [University of North Carolina math competency test for journalists](http://www.unc.edu/%7epmeyer/carstat/mathtestquestions.html) (http://www.unc.edu/~pmeyer/carstat/mathtestquestions.html)  
• [Poynter.org: Why Math Matters by Chip Scanlan](http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=52&aid=71048) (with additional links) (http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=52&aid=71048)

**Plagiarism.** Students sometimes get mixed up about what constitutes plagiarism, but journalists should never let that happen. They should understand that plagiarism is one of the worst things they can do, and they should know how to avoid it. Here is what the Detroit Free Press has to say about plagiarism:

When material is used in a story from sources other than the writer's own reporting, those sources--other publications, previous Free Press stories, radio or TV newscasts, etc.--should be indicated in the story. That attribution need not be made for simple, verifiable facts like dates, but is essential for information that goes beyond simple fact-quotations or descriptions not heard or seen by the current reporter, characterizations or other generalizations not based on the writer's own reporting, etc...

Using someone else's work without attribution -whether deliberately or thoughtlessly--is a serious ethical breach. Staff members should be alert to the potential for even small, unintentional acts of plagiarism, especially in the reporting of complicated stories involving many sources.

Borrowing ideas from elsewhere, however, is considered fair journalistic practice. Problems arise in the gray areas between the acceptable borrowing of inspiration and the unacceptable stealing of another's work. Our standards:

Words directly quoted from sources other than the writer's own reporting should be attributed. That may mean saying the material came from a previous Free Press story, from a television interview, from a magazine or book or wire service report.

When other work is used as the source of ideas or stylistic inspiration, the result must be clearly your own work. That is, what is acceptable to learn from another are the elements of style and approach-tone, rhythm, vocabulary, topic ideas-and not specific words, phrases, images.

You can find what other codes of ethics have to say about plagiarism at [Journalism.org](http://www.journalism.org/resources/tools/ethics/plagiarism/excerpts.asp).

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