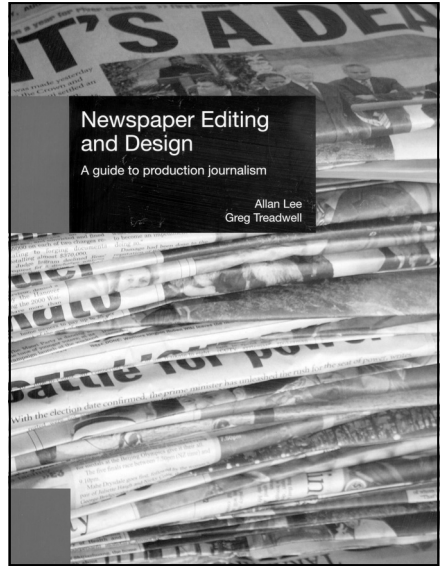


JAMES HOLLINGS is a journalism lecturer at Massey University and a former deputy chief subeditor of The Evening Post.

Vision but flaws mar needed editing textbook

Newspaper Editing and Design: A guide to production journalism, by Allan Lee and Greg Treadwell. Auckland: Pearson Education, 2009, 168 pp. ISBN 978-144-2503-13-7



THE CRAFT of subediting tends to be an unsung one in the annals of journalism. Usually it is more conspicuous by its absence; a well-subbed paper helps its stories and pictures shine, without clutter or errors that confuse readers and undermine the paper's credibility.

Yet outside the walls of the subbery, very few reporters, let alone readers, spare much thought for the expertise that goes into packaging their daily read. As a long-time reporter who entered the subbery late, I am one of those who underestimated the attention to detail, speed, nerve, teamwork and often sheer wit it takes to produce fresh, punchy, live news pages, especially on a late-breaking story.

This timely publication by two lecturers at AUT University's journalism school is aimed at putting that imbalance right, and more importantly passing on some of the craft built up over generations of subediting in New Zealand. There is a nice introduction looking back at the history of newspaper production, which sets the tone for the whole book; chatty and easy to read, if a little long-winded in places.

The authors then go on to cover the production process up to the point pages are sent to the typesetters, including copytasting, copyediting, rewriting intros, headlines, design of news pages and layout of articles, and selection of pictures. There are also exercises at the end of each chapter

on such things as writing intros and headlines.

Generally the explanation is solid and reflects current journalistic practice, but I do have some reservations that stop me from endorsing this book as it is. One is the confusion of design with layout. The authors use them interchangeably, and I know that many subs conflate the two, but generally I agree with those texts that suggest it is more helpful to define design as the look of the page—including such as things as choice of fonts, colour etc and layout as the way stories and pictures are arranged within the design parameters.

In fact, the whole organisation of the design/ layout sections seems odd; picture editing comes after layout, when in fact page layout can only be done once the pictures are selected.

At the front of the book there is a weak section on design by self-proclaimed British guru Matthew Straker, which in any case seems to be partly repeated later in the book. It could easily be cut.

But although a little baffling, this organisational whimsy is not a fundamental problem, and in general the explanation in the text itself is solid. My main concern is the chapter labelled ‘mechanics’—mostly grammar. This is poor, consisting mainly of an eclectic selection of common errors, rather than any systematic

exposition of general principles.

The authors assert that ‘most subs would lack the technical vocabulary of an English teacher’; this is not my experience, and in any case, should they? Grammar is not that hard.

An understanding of such basics as case, tense, mood, the parts of speech and syntax is essential for any copyeditor, newspaper or otherwise, and there is no excuse for ignoring them here. Likewise the section on house style is underdone; there is no mention of foundational style bibles such as *Hart’s Rules* or the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

There are also a couple of errors that I picked up; the worst one was the definition of defamation in the glossary. Defamation is not an ‘untrue statement about someone which harms their reputation’. A true statement can be defamatory, but it has a defence in law.

However, despite these reservations, I would still commend the authors for their vision. Journalism education does need a book like this.

With some hard pruning and a better chapter on grammar and writing it could become a core text for journalism students, those teaching media studies in high schools, and a useful companion for young subs on community papers who want to sharpen their skills.