In the Bookstores

Effective Onscreen Editing: New tools for an old profession (3rd edition)

By Geoff Hart;
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Do you ever see someone else use an unfamiliar shortcut or by tapping a few keyboard keys achieve something that seems to take you an age? Maybe you would like to spend a little less time working at your computer? If so, this could be the book for you.
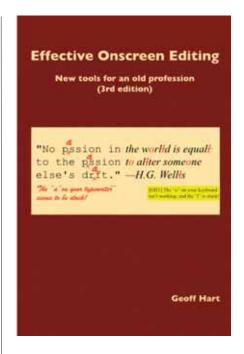
Available as printed, PDF, and eBook versions, *Effective Onscreen Editing: New tools for an old profession* is now in its third edition, which comprises 18 chapters, four appendices, and a lengthy glossary. It covers all imaginable aspects of editing, from inserting/moving/deleting text in Word documents and using Track Changes to working with other kinds of documents (such as databases and spreadsheets), using style sheets, and proofreading PDFs and online material. Importantly, there is detailed guidance for both PC and Mac users.

The book's author, long-time scientific editor Geoff Hart, uses Chapter 1 to outline his aim – to teach us "how to use the computer for things that computers do better than humans". He then attempts to persuade those of us still editing paper copies of documents that editing electronic versions is the way forward.

Perhaps displaying some of the conservatism Hart seeks to overcome, I initially wanted to review a printed copy of the book. In the event, I reviewed the 827-page PDF and quickly came to realise that this was more enriching than using a hard copy as it allowed me to test some of the author's tips and tricks onscreen directly after reading about them. I was also able to take advantage of the clickable table of contents and index.

For the averagely skilled Word user there will be much to learn. I myself was delighted to find out about exclusion dictionaries – lists of *correctly spelled* words that you get the spellchecker to flag. For example, you might wish to flag *form* and *from*, incorrect use of which may otherwise be missed. Or *thig*, a Scottish word for *beg* which I accidentally typed while writing this review. I will endeavour to use an exclusion dictionary henceforth.

Hart muses on what authors/clients want or expect from editors, referring to "authors who feel we're nothing more than glorified spell-checkers and grammar technicians" and "clients [who] often request proofreading of documents that really require moderate or heavy editing." However, rather than simply bemoaning such problems – ones which I am only too familiar with (!) – he constructively advises on avoiding and resolving them.

At various points throughout the book, Hart troubleshoots anticipated problems and provides advice on working more efficiently by creating or exploiting shortcuts in Word. Further trouble-shooting and a collection of useful shortcuts can be found in two of the appendices. Unless you have an encyclopaedic knowledge of shortcuts, you are bound to find something useful here.

Some chapters will be more generally or widely useful than others. Personal highlights include splendid chapters and sections on Find and Replace, Comments, navigating documents, and using macros. I can also highly recommend the author's advice on transforming AutoFormat and AutoCorrect from annoyances to assets.

Other parts, such as the guidance on editing text received in HTML, XHTML, or other markup languages, are no doubt of more specialist interest. The book's final two chapters, which cover overcoming resistance to and implementing onscreen editing, will inevitably become increasingly redundant as onscreen editing heads for ubiquity.

Hart seems to have thought of everything, offering detailed advice on backing up and protecting your work and your Word customisations and even covering avoiding injury while working at the computer and deciding how much to charge for your editorial services. Are there any deficiencies or limitations? Not many. Cross-references to other sections in the text are not clickable and some overly basic information is included, seemingly at the request of readers of earlier versions of the book. But skipping to the information you need is one of the things this book was designed for and something which the generous yet judicious use of headings and bold text only facilitates.

The author rightly does not view this third edition of *Effective Onscreen Editing* as a finished project. He actively invites input from readers and promises updates to the web versions of the different chapters. He does not yet look beyond Word 2010 (PC) and Word 2011 (Mac), already superseded by Word 2013 and now Word 2016. Other new versions of Word will emerge, each with added, modified, or lost functionality. Major changes to functionality will hopefully be described in future editions of the book or supplementary web pages.

This might just be the most useful book I have ever reviewed. Anyone who does any kind of editing work or who wishes to use Word more efficiently should strongly consider buying it.

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