Effective onscreen editing: New tools for an old profession

reviewed by Elaine Raahauge

Elaine Raahauge is a past Treasurer of the ASTC (NSW). She has been in technical communication for many years and offered to review Geoff Hart's book.

Geoff, as you may recall, is an STC Fellow and works as a freelance scientific editor, specialising in ESL authors. His book is published by Diaskeuasis Publishing, Quebec, Canada. ISBN: 978-9-9783227-0-0.

> **Editing onscreen has the potential to make us better editors, to free us from the drudgery of traditional editorial tasks, and to focus on improving the author's ability to communicate with their audience.**

The first thing that struck me about this book was how extensive and comprehensive the table of contents was and secondly, it had a lot of pages. I admit to have felt overwhelmed when it arrived and I saw there were 723 pages. What had I gotten myself into?

Geoff says, upfront, that this book will not teach you how to edit nor will it help you with grammar. Well then, what is it about and how can it help you?

Many of us currently edit online documents and some, like me, prefer to print them out rather than edit them on screen. This is very inefficient according to Geoff and he is right. Documents are usually created online so why do we waste paper by printing them and how do we return the edited paper document to the author? What if the author is sitting in the same room and we hand the edited document to them to incorporate the changes? Still a problem as some handwritten edits are missed or misinterpreted. As online edits are already incorporated into the document, nobody has to decipher poor handwriting and they only have to accept or reject as they see fit. Editing online is faster and more efficient—how much easier it is to find the same misspelt word in an electronic document using 'Find' than leafing through a paper document mumbling to yourself that you know it is here somewhere… To summarise Geoff: editing onscreen has the potential to make us better editors, to free us from the drudgery of traditional editorial tasks, and to focus on improving the author's ability to communicate with their audience.

Geoff chose Microsoft Word to illustrate the application of the techniques he covers, as Word is the most popular word processor and almost all of us know how to use it—to varying degrees. He covers modifying Word 2003, Word 2007, and Word 2008 for Macintosh to personalise your software and make using it more streamlined and efficient.

There is a lot of useful and practical material such as setting your rate, backing up your work, and communicating with the client before getting down to the actual editing.

I liked that he provides links to his web site to give more detail on items mentioned in his book. For example, in *Chapter 1* Geoff talks about the differences between Word 2003 and 2007 and provides links to the Microsoft website for the differences in commands, menus, and keyboard shortcuts.

I also liked that he makes himself accessible. He has limited the screen pictures in his book and welcomes you to email him if you would like a particular one.

But, as Geoff says, be selective and start with *Chapter 4 Personalising how your software works*, and *Chapter 6 Using revision tracking*. After you have the basics covered, you can expand your knowledge by selectively reading other chapters, for example, *Chapter 5* covers moving around the document and selecting text and *Chapter 9* covers developing style sheets.

All in all, there are 18 chapters and 4 appendices plus a whole host of additional information. This book is huge! Now I understand why the table of contents is so comprehensive.

If you have been writing and editing for a few years, you will be likely to have a broad overview of the subjects covered and you can use this book to expand on your knowledge and fill in gaps.

The book is well written, is easy to read and understand, and there is a lot of useful information that is readily accessible. It would be a useful reference if used selectively.

Geoff puts an excellent case forward for editing online but I will continue to use a combination of paper and online editing and choose the best option depending upon the circumstances. I think the book is good value at around US$20 for a PDF and US$34 (plus postage) for a hard copy.