

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

Review: *Effective Onscreen Editing* by Adrienne Montgomerie

If you've been focusing on editing tasks so much that you haven't had time to learn about the tools you use, then boost your practice immensely by setting aside 10 minutes a day to read through *Effective Onscreen Editing: New Tools for an Old Profession* (third ed.) by Geoff Hart (EOE3). Because of how much faster it will make your work, you'll earn back the cost of this book just by reading "Appendix IV: Word keyboard shortcuts." You might spend your first 10-minute session there. (Full disclosure: Hart mentions my writing and training in this book.)

Editors looking for immediate return on investment should start somewhere near the middle of the book or in the appendices, where Hart gets into the usefulness of Word's features, like **Styles** and **Templates** and the **Spike** (which will blow your mind). He also suggests how to do revision tracking when not working in Word.

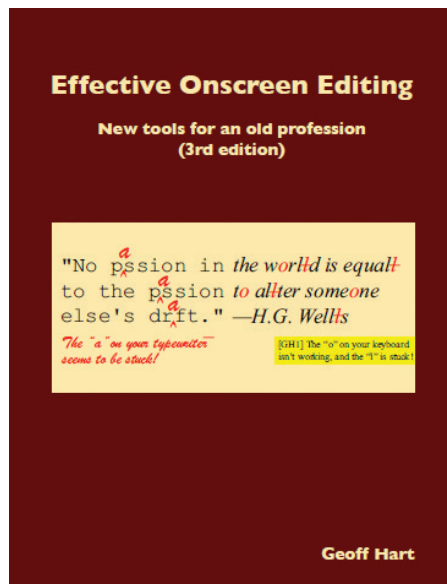
Hart's tips wow me fairly regularly, and I have been teaching onscreen editing for seven years. For example, he explains how to create a custom menu in Word for your working files. No spoilers; go read that one for yourself.

This book isn't a guide on "how to use Word" or about "using PDF markup." It's about the principles and best practices that make editing with computers more efficient and effective than editing on paper and the best practices that reduce frustration and loss. The principles focus on issues like making use of the tools at hand, managing files, and keeping your files safe—meaning both intact and secure.

There are practical tips on using various software, but primarily in conceptual terms rather than "click here, select this" directions.

BEYOND MS WORD

The benefits of Word add-ins such as **PerfectIt** and **Editorium** come late in the book. Other software used in the production process, such as **InCopy**, are mentioned, but Hart doesn't instruct readers on how to make the most of them, beyond telling us that some now have revision tracking.



A brief glimpse of ebook and web markup (HTML, XML, and SGML) is given, but there isn't enough to make working with them easier. There's unlikely to be enough here for someone unfamiliar with XML to be able to edit without damaging the code. All of the tips relate to manual hacks for hand coding rather than to using software designed to make such editing easier. I wish this book had more detail on methods for editing such content or talked about special software that is used to manage the tags (e.g., **XMetal** is mentioned, but not **Oxygen** or **FrameMaker**) or on how to hack the process more efficiently to make use of tools in Word. But an adequate resource would probably be a book in itself.

BEYOND ONSCREEN EDITING

Much more than onscreen editing is covered in this book. Hart goes into some depth about the mechanics and ethics of pricing editing services, a very useful discussion that seems a bit tangential to working onscreen. Later, an entire chapter is devoted to what to look for when proofreading. Hart waxes philosophical for 23 pages about the advantages of editing onscreen. When the first edition came out 10 years ago, this may have been necessary discussion in some

circles. Today, I hope that any career editor would already be convinced that onscreen is the only way to work.

Beyond the surface of editing onscreen, Hart offers tips for efficiently tackling bibliographic cross-references, staying on track, finding where you left off, and proofreading. He even makes an argument for not tracking some changes (with which I agree). Readers even get an entire chapter on style sheets—which applies to all editing, whether onscreen or on paper—as well as memory aids for keeping all decisions top of mind.

ADVICE EDITORS MIGHT NOT GET ELSEWHERE

Addressing non-narrative content is a welcome topic—databases, software interface text, multimedia, and graphics, for example. Hart presents some creative solutions to marking up video and graphics without using graphics software, but I was surprised that the concept of saving graphics and screenshots to PDF, then using the drawing tools in **Acrobat**, wasn't more prominent, since this approach requires next to no software skill.

Essential reading in this book that editors might not get in other editorial training includes information on security (maintaining confidentiality), backups, maintenance, collaborative real-time editing online, and "Appendix II: Protecting yourself from injury while using the computer."

BEYOND THE BOOK

Directions for using software are found on the companion website, instead of in the book. Hart explains he did this so the content could be updated and to keep this book under 827 PDF pages (the print version is 518 pages). The site is subdivided by chapter and includes an errata page. It's a little tedious to have to remember what chapter a topic is in to find it on the website.

ESSENTIAL READING

Reading the list of updates to this edition should convince editors that they will get a

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great return on the time they invest in this book, despite its flaws.

What makes this book useful for all editors is that it focuses on the *principles* of effective computer use. It's about processes and best practices rather than specific software. However, *EOE3* does have enough tips on using Word to make you a power user, and it's non-specific enough to be useful for editors using older versions of Word, too. The book doesn't address Word 2016, however, which Hart said was too buggy to recommend at the time of printing.

WHAT YOU CAN SKIP

Au courant professionals can skip the 80-plus pages that make the argument that onscreen editing is useful and more efficient than editing on paper. The section on manually tracking changes is longer than I'd like. Hart's argument is that sometimes we have to use the software that our clients insist on. However, the world now has access to **Google Docs** for free. Its tracking system is not the best, but it's better than doing it manually through highlighting or font changes. There is no reason to be tracking changes manually anymore.

The beginning of the book is filled with advanced technical settings, such as screen

refresh rates and how to tweaking the standard options common to most word processing software. Later in the book, "Using the Internet to Improve Your Editing" seems like another chapter that should go without saying, though it does contain some lesser-known tips about wildcards and operators for use in online searches. For those editors who have not yet absorbed this knowledge from daily life, this is a good primer.

The long explanation of what proofreading really is and how many inexperienced "publishers" get it wrong is valuable but might be better placed in another book. The background on how layout can go wrong, creating flubs that proofreaders look for, may be valuable insight for spotting and explaining how to correct such errors, but a checklist might have the same effect with less reading.

HOW TO USE THE BOOK

The PDF version of *EOE3* was used for this review. The clickable bookmarks in the PDF make it easy to flip among sections and chapters, and the search function makes it easy to find keywords throughout the book; although something went wrong with the heading levels in the copy I got, it was still navigable.

The book is only part of the resource. The website for the book is where you'll find detailed instructions and illustrations. It was hard to find the web links to the support site for the book, since the links are not identified by words I thought to search for (*website, link, URL*). A link appears below the title in each chapter, a reasonable place for anyone who is reading linearly, which is not how I take in reference works. Instinctively, I looked for it on the copyright page and other front matter, where it is not.

A USEFUL RESOURCE

The bottom line is that there are more than enough gems in this book to recoup the cover price within a day of editing. The list of changes and additions to this edition is proof enough. I suggest not reading the book from cover to cover. Set aside 10 minutes a day to dip in and out, consuming chapters as they appeal to you, and this book will power up your onscreen editing skills within a month.

Effective Onscreen Editing is available directly from **Geoff-Hart.com** in PDF and EPUB formats (readable by most devices). For the print edition, go to **Lulu.com**. ■

