EDITING THE FUTURE
Helping Copy Desks Meet the Challenges of Changing Media

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FOR A COPY OF THIS REPORT, WRITE TO THE DIRECTOR OF “EDITING THE FUTURE”:
Deborah Gump, Ph.D.
Knight Professor of News Editing
101 Scripps Hall
E.W. Scripps School of Journalism
Ohio University
Athens, Ohio 45701-2979

gump@ohio.edu

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THE KNIGHT OHIO PROGRAM FOR EDITING AND EDITING EDUCATION offers programs to support the teaching of future copy editors and the professional development of working editors. The program is based at the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism at Ohio University and is supported by a grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Working with organizations such as the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication and the American Copy Editors Society, KOPEE works to improve the teaching of editing at the high school and university level, creates programs for journalism educators, supports the spread of information gained through research and contributes to the continuing education of professional editors. One such initiative is the development of editteach.org, a growing site of interactive resources for students and professionals. For more information, get in touch with Dr. Deborah Gump, Knight professor of editing, 101 Scripps Hall, Ohio University, 740-593-0093, gump@ohio.edu.

The FREEDOM FORUM DIVERSITY INSTITUTE helps daily newspapers identify and train mid-career people of color for professional newsroom careers. Daily newspapers nominate local candidates to the Diversity Institute and agree to hire the Institute’s successful graduates as full-time reporters, copy editors, photographers and graphic artists. Located on the campus of Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn., the Institute also forms partnerships with other news industry organizations to develop training programs to help the industry increase the quality of content and staff diversity. For more information contact: Freedom Forum Diversity Institute, 1207 18th Avenue S., Nashville, Tenn. 37212, 615-727-1401, www.diversityinstitute.org.

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EDITOR:  Deborah Gump
WRITER:  Beverly Kees
DESIGNER:  Angelo DeVigal
COVER:  Angelo DeVigal and Sarah Bowman
INTRODUCTION

Every evening, in every kind of newsroom, editors gather to turn the day’s news into tomorrow’s news report.

The editors come from throughout the newsroom – the managing editor, section editors, editors in charge of visuals and the editors in charge of production – and they share the goal of giving their readers what they need and want to know to lead informed lives and contribute to their communities of interest.

It is the news editor and the copy editors, however, who are the last to see the news report before it is published. The editors on the copy desk serve as the newspaper’s surrogate for readers. Copy editors come to the news as the readers do, whether the news is on newsprint or a computer screen. If editors fail to fix a mistake or suggest a vital improvement, not only does the public suffer but also the newspaper. If errors are routinely recognized by readers, both short-term and long-term consequences follow. In the short term, the reader’s instant reaction is one of ridicule or dismay. But over the long term, repeated errors can lead to loss of trust in the newspaper.

In an industry that devotes only a small fraction of its resources to staff development, copy editors too often are the last to be considered for training and resources. Substantial strides have been made in recent years to focus attention on the copy desk as a valuable resource of expertise across all disciplines, from information gathering and writing to editing and packaging. Efforts such as those by the American Copy Editors Society have built a thriving network of copy editors eager to improve themselves and their organizations.

For such gains to continue, the newspaper industry should edit the future through a culture of learning, one that recognizes the value of editors as gatekeepers who insure fulfillment of the newspaper’s core obligation to be accurate, fair, balanced and complete. They must make the same kinds of choices for their news organizations as they do for their audiences: What is the knowledge required to build excellence in their corps of gatekeepers?

“Editing the Future,” a two-day conference sponsored by the Knight Ohio Program for Editing and Editing Education, the Poynter Institute, the Maynard Institute and the Freedom Forum Diversity Institute, brought together editors from across the industry to consider key issues confronting newsrooms. How do we hire good editors and then train them for advancement? How do we guard against inaccuracies and build credibility? How do we cover communities that grow more diverse daily? How do we cope with a rapidly changing media landscape, one that has turned Web sites from an “extra” operation to an integral part of the news report?

Nowhere are these questions more urgent than on the copy desk, which sits at the nexus of what we did yesterday and what we need to do tomorrow.

Deborah Gump, Ph.D.
Knight Professor of News Editing
E.W. Scripps School of Journalism
Ohio University
‘EDITING IS AT THE HEART AND THE CORE OF WHAT WE’RE ABOUT’

John Seigenthaler, founder of the First Amendment Center

Journalism, racked by challenges to its integrity and credibility and the demands of a post-9/11 world, is at a crossroads. The direction in which journalism turns depends in large part on the integrity and credibility of its editors.

John Seigenthaler, founder of the First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University, chairman emeritus of The Tennessean and founding editorial director of USA Today, opened the “Future of Editing” conference with that message and a call for editors to act accordingly.

“You’ve got your hands on the most important information instruments in the history of humankind,” he said, adding that “people learn about themselves” through the written word.

“You – we – are gatekeepers, and how you perform is important to the institution, but beyond that, it is so important to a world beyond. We’ve known since 9/11 that McLuhan’s words were not a cliche. We are a global village, and we’ve got to be well understood,” he said. “We’re only going to be well understood if those of you who are about editing, who are committed to improving editing, to improving the quality of life of journalism by quality editing, remain committed to the job of gatekeeper.”

Seigenthaler said that “great editors make great reporters,” not the reverse.

“I was good because great editors had the sense to challenge and question what I wrote and who my sources were and where my information came from and what my slant was and whether I had a bias,” he said.

“Editing is at the heart and the core of what we’re about.”

Seigenthaler said one of his proudest moments came when he was cited as one of America’s 10 best editors, along with Bob Maynard, founder of the Robert C. Maynard Institute for Journalism Education and the first African American editor of a major metro when he took over The Oakland Tribune.

“I was so proud to be standing beside him when the picture was taken and to have him say that what we do as editors is the most important thing that can happen to American journalism,” he said. “It’s not just good for us, not just good for the reporters, not just good for the publishers, not just good for the institution, not just good for the bottom line – it’s so good for every reader that editors of intellect, intelligence, insight, vision, character and integrity watch over every word.”

John McIntyre, assistant managing editor, copy desk, The Baltimore Sun, underscored the importance of copy editors – not always heralded in newsrooms.

“Newspapers are run by people who used to be reporters,” McIntyre said. “To a reporter, working on a copy desk is like an Edwardian gentleman going into trade. It’s unthinkable, unspeakable.”

Writers, he said, “are not the best judges of their own work (and) the degree to which we become production units will not eliminate the need for editing.”

“Some copy editors are told only to check spelling, write a head and format the story.” If all a copy editor does is mark paragraph indents (with the L-shaped editing symbol), he said, “you are a graf hooker, a drone. It will corrode your self respect.”

“We aim for accuracy. We aim for clarity. We aim for balance – and, when we can get it, elegance of expression. We need to have the independence to point out these things.”

“You are dressed for the opera or a reception at the publisher’s house. Someone tells you you’re dragging a streamer of toilet paper with you on your shoe. It’s not welcome news … but you need to hear it,” McIntyre said.

“Let my people edit.”

‘Let my people edit.’

John McIntyre, ACES president
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THE PROBLEMS

News and copy desks have taken on the former duties of composing rooms and the new duties of multimedia copy, often without additional or sufficient staff to handle them. When copy is shoveled, rather than edited – when the last bulwark against error is weakened – the results can lead to lawsuits and declining credibility.

Editing skills are not the same as design skills, but editors are sometimes treated as interchangeable parts.

Journalism programs rarely stress copy editing courses, so many new journalists don’t think about editing as a career. The copy editing pool is declining.

Copy editors need regular training to update and improve their skills every bit as much as do assigning editors and beat reporters, but they are less likely to get it.

It’s as easy for copy editors as for reporters to see stories only from their own perspectives. They can miss nuances that their readers, reading from different perspectives, can see.

News organizations with profits from 17 to 25 percent and more say they can’t afford training and instead rely on programs offered by news foundations and organizations.

THE SOLUTIONS

News and copy desks are the heart of new multimedia organizations. They need to be staffed and trained sufficiently to handle the growing responsibilities. Often training can be done in-house at little or no cost.

Recruiters and trainers must look for and develop editors with the particular skills needed to edit copy and design pages.

Start in the high schools to interest students in editing. Talk to journalism faculty about the editing needs in news organizations. Look beyond journalism courses to school newspapers and English departments to find editing candidates.

Make sure copy editors get a part of the training dollar and also do short courses – 30 minutes at a time – on the desk on specific subjects such as improving headline writing.

Editors as well as reporters need training to see the news from different perspectives.

News organizations should budget at least 2 percent of payroll annually for training. (See Bob Giles’ article on page 6.)
WHY THE COPY DESK MATTERS TO A SUCCESSFUL AND PROFITABLE NEWSPAPER

Abridged keynote speech by Bob Giles, curator, Nieman Foundation

A useful beginning for a talk in praise of copy editing is to recall stories about stories – stories about stories that resulted in lengthy and expensive libel suits.

In 1988, the Fort Wayne, Ind., Board of Public Health closed down a local restaurant called Bandido’s after an inspection that uncovered evidence of rodent droppings. The Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette published a story that accurately reported the board’s action. The deck with the main head said that inspectors had found rats and roaches.

The following day, the newspaper ran a story correcting the error in the headline and apologizing for the mistake. Bandido’s eventually brought a libel action against the newspaper. The trial court issued summary judgment in favor of the Journal-Gazette. The Indiana Appeals Court ruled that there were facts in dispute and the case should go to trial.

The trial jury awarded the restaurant $985,000. Eight years after the story appeared, the state court of appeals reversed the trial court. Then in the Indiana Supreme Court the newspaper won, and later the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the case.

Eleven years of legal defense costs. The newspaper’s out-of-pocket expenses came to just short of $300,000, in addition to what its libel insurance policy had paid. Among the costs to be considered was the wear and tear on the staff and the time invested in depositions and other matters.

While the number of libel trials and verdicts against newspapers each has declined in recent years, libel awards still are a major concern for news organizations.

We can also find stories about stories where normal newsroom gate-keeping practices were by-passed.

A tragic reporting and editing failure of our generation is the Cincinnati Enquirer investigation of Chiquita Banana, in which the newspaper reported that company officials made business decisions in Latin America to cover up a bribery scheme involving the company and subsidiary employees.

The eventual disclosure that the lead reporter had broken into the company’s e-mail system and stolen propriety information initiated a sequence of events that included a page one apology by the Enquirer, a $15 million payment by Gannett to Chiquita to avoid a lawsuit, the firing of the reporter, who eventually avoided a prison term by cooperating with prosecutors, and the dismissal of the newspaper’s highly respected editor.

Critical to our purpose here is to recall the decision by Enquirer editors to keep the investigation secret from the rest of the newsroom and to edit the special report themselves behind closed doors.

The stories also were vetted by Gannett corporate news executives and lawyers, who did some rewriting of their own and approved the series for publication. At every step, from story conception to the final headline, the Enquirer copy desk was not included.

Then we encounter stories about stories when everyone thought they were just doing their jobs.

A story we all remember is about Richard Jewell, a security guard, who became a suspect in a bombing at the 1996 Olympics, and the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, eager to score a beat on an international story in its own town, rushed it into a special afternoon Olympic edition.

The news that Jewell was the focus of a federal investigation into the pipe bomb explosion was not attributed. The paper used a technique, with which I frankly am not familiar, described as “the voice of God.” The practice is rare and its main characteristic seems to be not even citing unidentified sources.

A second-day opinion piece by the newspaper’s leading sports columnist likened Jewell to a notorious Atlanta murderer of an earlier time named Wayne Williams. Four copy editors who read the column found it unfair, possibly libelous, or both. Two of the copy editors flagged the column as troublesome and alerted senior editors of their
concerns, but they were rebuffed, they later testified, and the column ran as written.

Finally we know of stories about stories in which reporters, and sometimes editors, adopt as their own the theories and suspicions of criminal investigators.

That was a factor in The Boston Globe’s coverage of the brutal murder of two Dartmouth college professors. At an early phase in the investigation, The Globe published a front-page story saying investigators believe the killings were “crimes of passion” resulting from “an adulterous love affair” involving the husband. The story quoted unnamed law enforcement officers in the investigation.

Following the arrest, a short while later, of two youths in Indiana, who eventually confessed to the crimes, The Globe concluded that its story was inaccurate and, in a front-page message to readers, the editor made a forthright statement of regret.

I wrote in an op-ed piece published in The Globe a few weeks later saying that the risks of relying on unidentified sources are rarely as clearly or tragically demonstrated as they had been in the coverage of the murder of the Dartmouth professors.

Arthur Gelb, a former managing editor of The New York Times who has chronicled his 40-year life at the newspaper in a new book, City Room, recalls a speech by Adolph Ochs at the Columbia School of Journalism in 1925 in which Ochs described the copy editor as “a news digester” who had the duty “to go through the process of elimination, saving the newspaper space and the reader time.”

“Writers are there galore,” Ochs said, but good copy editors – men who could put a story “in printable form with its values disclosed and brought within the understanding of the reader” – were in short supply.

Gelb quotes a maxim from Carr Van Anda, an earlier managing editor at The Times, who said that “a newspaper is made on the desk.”

While it is engaging to think about those earlier times, we surely have come some distance from the horseshoe-shaped copy desk, with editors sitting around the rim working with soft, black pencils, rearranging stories with the help of scissors and a paste pot, then stuffing stories, sometimes a page at a time, into a pneumatic tube and shooting them off to the composing room.

The computer has added speed and flexibility to editing, and pagination has brought the back shop into the newsroom while giving editors greater control of page production and inviting creative enterprise in the design of the newspaper.

The expectation was that new jobs would be created to compensate for the back shop duties being shifted to news and copy desks and photo departments.

Gene Foreman, former managing editor of The Philadelphia Inquirer and now a teacher of editing at Penn State, looked at the results in a piece for the ASNE Bulletin in 1999: “More often, the copy desks did not grow. To the contrary, in the economic squeeze of the last decade, their staffing declined as their workload increased.”

Web sites have brought new, time-consuming demands to copy desks. Foreman quoted Pam Robinson, president of the American Copy Editors Society, who said that “to save money, copy editors at some papers are coding stories for the Web site or library files in addition to coding them for producing the newspaper.”

Spell check has surely reduced the number of typos, but one still finds errors in papers that suggest newspapers are not putting as many resources into quality control as are needed.

In a study on burnout published in 1993, copy editors were found to be the group in the newsroom most likely to face burnout, particularly among the younger members of the desk who were asked to perform several functions, including editing, layout and design. Emotional exhaustion and depersonalization – two key indicators of burnout – were found to be more prevalent among copy editors than among reporters.

In several studies, copy editors have expressed a strong desire for more training and a frustration that training is not a high priority, that few on the desk are able to have a formal training experience and that more training dollars are spent on editors and reporters covering specialized beats.

A recent study by the Council of Presidents of National Journalism Organizations identified 191 organizations that now provide training and education for journalists.
To a considerable extent, this broad landscape is misleading. The training and education programs many of these organizations offer are modest, and collectively, they fall far short of meeting the need.

Most of the money for their programs comes from foundations, or from their own fund-raising efforts, rather than from the news organizations their educational programs ultimately serve.

Can you imagine another industry that so depends on charity to pay for the education of its workforce?

Companies like General Motors and General Electric believe it is in the best interests of their companies, and their shareholders, to invest in the knowledge base of their employees. They understand that brainpower is an imperative in creating new products and sustaining market share in their industries. These companies are fully committed to investing in training and education across the breadth of the workforce. Lifelong learning is part of the culture.

Many of the editors whose training budgets are being squeezed work for publicly traded newspaper companies with annual returns that range from 17 to 25 percent. By almost any measures of profitability, these numbers are impressive.

Compared to other industry sectors, however, the share of operating budgets news organizations commit to training, education and professional development is at the low end of the scale. According to the Readership Institute at the Media Management Center at Northwestern University, the average newspaper industry expenditure on formal training is 0.7 percent of payroll.

The national average for companies that have been tracked on this scale is 2 percent, or nearly three times what newspapers spend on training. The National Association of Manufacturers recommends that companies spend 3 percent of payroll on training.

Much has been said and much has been written in the past two years about the nature of newspaper company profits and the need to strike a better balance between the bottom line and good journalism. The point about newspaper profits is not that margins of 20 percent and higher are exorbitant – although some would argue that they are – but that the long-term health of newspaper companies requires them to invest greater amounts in such newsgathering resources as newshole, staff and training.

Knowledge of how the world works is the special province of copy editors. They are expected to prevent the grievous sins that I described at the start of this talk. But they also are empowered to prevent the far less sensational crimes of journalism.

Avid readers in our communities take note when headlines are off the mark or when facts are not intelligently respected and create misimpressions of what really happened. In its 1998 study on newspaper credibility, ASNE found that headlines were a major source of reader concern about credibility.

As journalists, we face daily demands to explain, clarify and interpret for our readers and viewers. We report on and edit issues that are complex and, more often than not, contain elements of science, technology, medicine, economics and engineering, as well as human emotion and political or ideological conflict.

During my years at the Freedom Forum’s Media Studies Center, I directed a three-year study of fairness in the news media. One of the important findings in our work was that the public respects the professional and technical skills journalists bring to their craft, but fears that journalists don’t know enough. Specifically, the public thinks journalists don’t have an authoritative understanding of the complicated world they try to explain to the public.

If the robust nature of the U.S. economy is powered by the idea that people and organizations have an almost unlimited power to improve themselves through education; if journalistic excellence and profitability go hand in hand, as the late Katharine Graham [of The Washington Post] has said; if investment in human capital is the soundest strategy in a modern economy, as Nobel laureate Gary Becker argues; if both excellence and profitability are enhanced by an intelligent, highly educated, alert, resourceful news staff, as the evidence indicates – it remains a mystery to me why news organizations don’t put a higher premium on training and education.

Knowledge of how the world works is the special province of copy editors.
HOW DID WE GET HERE AND WHERE ARE WE GOING?

Technology has brought the copy desk from the days of manual typewriters and testy optical scanners to time-intensive pagination systems, but it will be education and training that will equip copy desks to meet future challenges.

John Russial, associate professor at the University of Oregon, and John McIntyre, assistant managing editor of The Baltimore Sun’s copy desk, led a discussion that traced technological and organizational changes in the past 40 years. As the production work of proofreading and composition coding moved from the composing room to the copy desk, newspapers saved substantially in labor costs. Those savings, however, came at the price of increased demands on copy editors and, as some studies showed, increased error rates.

“Technology isn’t necessarily put in place to make your lives easier,” Russial said to the chuckles of editors at the conference. “It may indeed make your life easier – and in many cases, it has – but that’s not the motivating force.”

Some papers, such as The Baltimore Sun, hired additional page designers and copy editors as pagination loomed, McIntyre said, but other papers “made the leap without doing that and discovered there was a penalty to be paid.”

The spread of pagination led to a shortage of qualified copy editors, McIntyre said, at the same time that interest in copy editing in journalism schools waned. The resulting “scramble” to find copy editors means that many newspapers are happy to hire editors right out of school, he said. That creates a need for more in-house training. “We have to bring green copy editors in and season them ourselves,” he said.

Interns and new hires may arrive in the newsroom “technologically coordinated,” Russial said, but they may lack either the editor mindset, reporting experience, or both. Today’s copy editors can’t settle for only understanding what it takes to be a good reporter and writer, knowing how to edit copy and write headlines, and creating strong page designs; they must also figure out pagination, possibly html coding and maybe even video and audio editing.

If “copy editors are what copy editors do,” as Russial put it, then our understanding of what copy editing is must also change.

The demand for copy editors and the changing nature of the job puts journalism schools in the middle of a supply-and-demand problem. “The number of undergraduates interested in print journalism is small,” McIntyre said, “and the number of those students potentially interested in copy editing is smaller still.”

One needs “the right talent and temperament to be a copy editor,” said McIntyre, who also teaches copy editing at Loyola College as an adjunct instructor. “Most of the students I’ve taught over the past eight years would sooner make a living as carnival geeks than as copy editors, and for most of them, it would be a shrewder career choice.”

If journalism schools are to do a better job of training copy editors, Russial said, they need the help of profes-
professionals who demand it.

“I can tell you what gets the university’s attention—money,” he said, adding that the journalism school at the University of Oregon has raised about $7 million the past few years. “Every change we’ve made has come from alumni money.”

Not only are fewer students becoming copy editors, but also journalists of color are less likely to seek copy desk jobs.

“It’s hard to find people who want to take a job that is anonymous and has crappy hours,” McIntyre said. “Why seek out another place to sit in the back of the bus? Why find another place where I won’t get much attention and respect from colleagues? … You can’t just hire minority applicants and ignore them. You have to coach them. … and then put them in a position where they’ll get noticed.”

If newspapers hope to improve the quality of copy editing, they must raise the profile of copy editors.

One way to get attention for the copy desk is to keep a record of the errors the desk catches every day, McIntyre said. “If you put that down on the managing editor’s desk, that is a powerful statement of how valuable these copy editors are to the paper, and this is how you justify maintaining the staff or increasing it. One of my students penetrated to the heart of what it means to be a copy editor. She wrote on an evaluation at the end of the semester: ‘You catch 19 errors in a story and a 20th goes through, and you get penalized. It’s just not fair.’

“No, it is not fair, but that is the way it is.”

McIntyre also urged news editors and copy desk chiefs “to take time to work on the craft.”

At regional and national workshops by the American Copy Editors Society (www.copydesk.org), editors “talk about the details of editing, about the skills, about the issues, and they just blossom in front of your eyes. It’s the most astonishing thing.”

McIntyre said the same kind of experience can be set up on the desk during the regular shift. Schedule a half-hour to talk about headlines, one story, caption writing—any discrete topic.

“They just open up,” McIntyre said. “They don’t have time to talk about the work because they’re too busy doing the work. And when they get the chance, they get more imaginative, they get more engaged, more determined. We can do that now without adding any staff.”

McIntyre urged top editors to recognize the copy desk’s talent and management potential. “You should be positioning people on the copy desk to take positions of responsibility elsewhere in the newsroom, even if they don’t have reporting experience,” he said. “It is thought to be scandalous that a copy editor who has no experience as a reporter could do anything else. And yet it’s not thought at all odd to take a reporter who has no editing experience whatsoever and make him an assigning editor. … You need people in position of authority in the newsroom who understand production, who understand how the copy desk functions and the importance of that function.”

McIntyre and Russial agree that the one constant throughout technological change is the need for editing.

“We are still getting shockingly subliterate, ill-organized, unthought-out stories delivered to us every night,” McIntyre said, “and we have to edit them, or to attempt to edit them, while fulfilling these additional responsibilities because if we don’t master the technology and manipulate the machines, then the thing doesn’t come out on time, and I know where the blame lands when the thing doesn’t come out on time.”

The bottom line, however, is that the copy desk must have the active support of top management to be effective. “It makes all the difference in the world,” McIntyre said.

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**FORWARD INTO CHANGE**

Jeanine Jordan, executive news editor of the Sun-Sentinel in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., joined Janice Castro and John Russial to discuss how to lead a copy desk into a changing environment. Comments from them and other participants included:

- Training is vital on all levels.
- Do short training sessions on the desk.
- More emphasis needs to be on training for headline writing. Perhaps develop a basic checklist for writing headlines. Get copy editors around a table and discuss which headlines worked and which didn’t.
- Get copy editors talking to identify the issues that trouble them. Bring them along in solving problems.
- Fix recurring problems permanently instead of correcting them over and over.
- Go to the other desks early to identify and work out critical issues before deadlines.
- Send a copy desk newsletter to the entire newsroom with comments on what worked and what didn’t, written tersely, with an emphasis on “how to” rather than “don’t.”
REPORTER BRAIN, ASSIGNING EDITOR BRAIN AND COPY EDITOR BRAIN

Reporters, assigning editors and copy editors need to work as a team, but those team members have different perspectives that can put teammates at odds.

Helping editors “bridge the divide” comes naturally for Jacqui Banaszynski, who spent almost 20 years as a reporter before becoming an assigning editor. And there is a divide, she told the gathered editors, one of whom sent her an e-mail suggesting a theme for her talk:

“I think you are supposed to be the voice of sanity from the real side of the newsroom,” wrote the anonymous editor. “They need to hear that despite their good intentions, fine work and cynical outlook about reporters that without reporters none of us would exist. We’d all be panhandling, and badly, since passive-aggressive panhandlers all die hungry.”

Banaszynski described her early days as a reporter, when editors “had permission to yell at reporters and make them cry. … I had an editor once set fire to a story I wrote and drop it in a wastebasket … look at me and say, ‘You’re better than this. Try again.’”

Banaszynski, associate managing editor of The Seattle Times and Knight Chair in Editing at the University of Missouri, said she came into editing “reluctantly,” even though “there was not an editor I worked for who did not make me better.” When she finally made the switch, she said, her first three months on the job “were a disaster, and I learned three lessons very quickly”:

1. “Nobody wanted me to be the editor I wanted to be. They wanted me to be the editor they wanted me to be. Every individual reporter and writer I worked with had a distinct need that I needed to fill, and for each one of them it was different. So I had to learn to read each of those people differently and deal with them differently.”

2. “My sight line needed to change. When I was a reporter, all that mattered was my story – my story, my sources and who’s going to read my story. When I became an editor … I needed to be as tuned into the reporter and their story as possible but I also had to figure out two other constituencies. One, the newsroom – I had never worried about the newsroom before – and two, the audience, the readers out there. So all of a sudden I had three equal constituencies. … I needed to negotiate things differently.”

3. “Overnight, I got stupid. … I had been at the top of my game. I kind of knew what I was doing. I was doing some cool stories, I knew the community. I had sources. … I walked in the next day when I became an editor and all that went away. Here’s why: I was no longer out on the streets. I was inside the box that is the newsroom. I stopped having direct access to new ideas, to fresh ideas, the way things work in the world.”

Jacqui Banaszynski
Banaszynski distinguishes the different perspectives of copy editors, reporters and assigning editors by “mapping” their brains as they design an imaginary front page. The reporter envisions a front page with a tiny masthead, a four-inch byline and all the rest of the front page devoted to the reporter’s story.

The assigning editor’s brain held expanded teasers at the top, followed by the masthead. The next third of the page is reserved for local stories — despite the dark suspicion that some copy editor would bounce the city council budget for a Middle East story and “make believe they work for The New York Times.” Next comes a huge reader box with art and a two-column index to inside.

The copy editor’s brain is a neat and tidy page with teasers, masthead, two big stories side by side, smaller stories underneath and a teensy space at the bottom for “flexibility.”

“The assigning editor,” she said, “bridges the gap between the reporter and the copy editor.”

To make that relationship work smoothly, Banaszynski developed a Seven Deadly Sins list: “I grew up Catholic. Those of you who grew up Catholic know you’re always just one rosary away from the abyss.”

**SEVEN DEADLY SINS OF ASSIGNING EDITORS**

1. Can we talk? Lack of communication and planning; failure to think online; failure to involve art, graphics and design until the last (expletive deleted) moment.
2. Invasion of the word people. Lack of visual thinking. A story comes in parts.
3. Does anybody really know what time it is? Busting deadlines, rewriting on deadline, not even knowing the deadline.
4. Size matters. Stories that read long and are long; disrespectsing the page; disrespecting reader patience.
5. Trust me on this one. Lack of story sense; failure to front-end coach the story; failure to interview reporter before the story meeting; lack of urgency, timeliness and newsworthiness; wandering ledes, etc.
6. MIAs, KIAs and POWs. Sloppiness; the dog ate the dictionary, stylebook and the entire research library; failure to proofread or fact-check.
7. The buck stops anywhere but here. Valuing the reporter more than the story, reader or process; conflict aversion; blaming someone else — “the desk made me do it.”

**SEVEN DEADLY SINS OF COPY EDITORS**

1. Rule-bound and hide-bound. Following the rule out the window; we never … and we always …
2. Is there a hyphen in anal retentive? Failure to see the story for the commas; questions for questions’ sake; if you don’t want to be seen as Comma Control, talk to me about my story or my lede. Read the story first with your hands off the keyboard.
3. Sit quietly and carry a big red pencil (or when passive-aggressive becomes a verb). Wielding negative power; delight in finding errors and laying blame; better to bitch than fix.
4. Rigidity and righteousness. Inflexibility; unwillingness to change things on deadline; failure to communicate; changing without checking.
5. Laziness, theft and fatigue. Jumping the story without talking to the writer or editor; using the lede as a headline; cliches, libels and saying the obvious; news boredom — the “we’ve already read that” syndrome.
6. The BBI (Boring But Important) Factor. Resenting “local” news; hoarding the A section.
7. Byline envy. Martyrdom and paranoia; working weekends and night shifts.
**WHAT SENIOR EDITORS CAN DO TO PROMOTE CHANGE**

1. Provide more resources. There has been more work and fewer bodies.
2. Develop a fact-checking system. For example, take a story and circle the facts.
3. Create a coordinator for big projects. This person would be a “translator” between story people and graphics and photo people and desk people, someone who isn’t invested in any one of those systems.
4. Develop guidelines for using information from the Internet. We don’t always know where it comes from or its reliability.
5. Talk to big journalism schools about their priorities. More technology or more writing and editing courses? They are getting mixed signals from newsrooms.

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**THE SEVEN COUNTER VIRTUES TO THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS**

1. Prudence. Wisdom, carefulness, vigilance, thoughtfulness, discretion (get over the business of us v. them).
3. Justice. Need to be reader’s advocate first; fairness, impartiality, equity, rightness, impartiality.
4. Fortitude. Resoluteness, strength, courage, endurance; the problems in the newsroom don’t amount to a hill of beans to the reader.
5. Faith. Trust that I’m doing the best I can; loyalty, belief, conviction your role is important.
7. Charity. Generosity – if you see a pattern over and over, tell me about it; helpfulness – if the lede isn’t working, help me out. Mercy – just forgive me, I’ve got a hard life.

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**THE 10 COMMANDMENTS OF GETTING ALONG**

1. Get off your butts and talk to reporters and assigning editors in the newsroom.
2. Sit on your hands. Read the story first without hands on keyboard.
3. Walk in my shoes. Spend two weeks as an assigning editor. You’ll understand better that “your job is to serve an incredible dinner out of what you find in the refrigerator. My job is to go and get the food.”
4. Open your mouth. Tell me where the problems are; don’t keep your concerns to yourself.
5. Open your mind. Try to see what a story is trying to do. Maybe it’s OK to break the rules.
6. Don’t assume or presume. If you have questions, call me.
7. Give someone a stylebook for Christmas.
8. Show and tell (or tell and show). Teach me how to fix my mistakes so that they don’t recur.
9. Read from the inside out. Look for the structure that holds a story together or, worse, doesn’t.
10. If it ain’t broke….
Today’s copy editor faces a future that demands flexibility. An editor could start the shift editing a story for the newspaper, incorporate that story into a multimedia package for a partner television or radio station by lunch and end the day by putting that same report on the Web.

Janice Castro employed that same flexibility to talk about the various hats editors must be able to wear in editing’s online future. Castro, assistant dean and director of graduate editorial programs at Northwestern’s Medill School of Journalism, assumed the duties of her two fellow discussion leaders when at the last minute they were unable to attend the conference. The information from Nora Paul, director of the Institute for New Media Studies at the University of Minnesota, and Elizabeth Osder, director of Global Product Management for Yahoo’s Overture Services, was included in Castro’s presentation.

Editors can forget that a newspaper is simply “a delivery device,” Castro said, just like the computer or even a cell phone. “The news is not the newspaper,” she said. The key is to reshape content so that different media can deliver it effectively to the audience. “If I were to take the content of Time magazine and simply put it on television, that would not be effective television content,” Castro said. “That would be Time magazine on a big screen.”

It’s the same mistake that some newspapers are making with their online editions. Almost 80 percent of copy editors say that copy editing guidelines for Web news are the same as for print, according to a survey by Nora Paul. Online offerings need their own rules. Those rules include shorter sentences and paragraphs because “people are looking into a flickering light when they’re reading your content on a computer,” Castro said.

The computer screen is “a rich visual experience,” she said, but it’s hard to read text, especially the Times New Roman font, which so many newspapers use on their Web sites.

Newspaper fonts often don’t work because they break up, Castro said. “They were made to look elaborate and beautiful when ink was applied to them,” she said, but they don’t work with light behind them because light shows all the tiny holes in them.

Other style differences exist as well:

- Headlines play a different role online. Because they compete on screen with icons, links, ads and other marketing tools, she said, headlines must be “shorter and crisper” to work as entry points to the stories.
- Online news needs its own stylebook. For example, she said, don’t use percentage signs because they can’t be read clearly. Also, use more acronyms without periods because they are easier to read.

The processing of online news also carries differences. Staffing, for instance, can be limited in numbers and journalism experience.

“In order to get the technically oriented skill sets – and save money – the publishers always hire the young people who are right out of school and haven’t had any journalism experience yet because if they did, they’d cost a few more dollars,” she said.

Then there’s the incessant need for updates because readers, who turn to the Web almost if they’re turning on their radio, expect fresh copy. The continuous news cycle of the Web creates a culture clash, Castro said: “Online is urgent; copy editors are methodical.”

Castro urged the next generation of online editors to begin flexing their flexibility by learning:

- How to work like a wire service.
- How to work online and in print.
- How to balance speed and accuracy.
- How online writing differs from print and broadcast.
- How to edit different Web presentations.

**Convergence comes home**

Castro then moved into the presentation prepared by Elizabeth Osder, who wants editors to imagine the “opportunities of inevitability” – how can copy editors leverage the changes to come in a converged future to strengthen their role at the newspaper?

Osder recommends looking at convergence in the Tampa (Fla.) Tribune newsroom (www.tampatribune.com and http://recruiting.tampatrib.com/recruiting/workplace/convergence.htm) and the Ifra Newsplex at the University of South Carolina (http://newsplex.sc.edu).

The Tampa Tribune has a joint multimedia desk where newspaper and Internet editors and WFLA-TV producers work together – as their recruiters put it, “in print first thing in the morning, on television several times throughout the day and continuously over the Internet.”
Ifra, a German publishing organization, in 2002 donated a $2 million micro-newsroom to the University of South Carolina College of Mass Communications and Information Studies. Ifra and the college jointly operate the facility, which trains students, journalists and researchers in converged media management. “They’re trying to imagine what the newsroom of the future will look like,” Castro said.

It’s not a simple question to answer, or even define:
- What exactly is convergence? Is it simply an ownership issue, a common approach to advertising, a structural approach to news dissemination, or parts of all three?
- To whom does online report? “That’s a huge issue,” Castro said. “At some of the most respected newspapers in this country, which shall remain unnamed, online used to report to marketing.”
- The nature of storytelling changes. After all the elements of a story are in digital form, Castro pointed out, “it’s liquid” and can be poured into any number of delivery devices.

Once that happens, Castro said, the copy desk is “at the center of tomorrow’s newsroom,” preparing copy for the newspaper, e-newsletters, cell phones, Web sites, broadcast and syndication.

“The copy desk can be not only the quality control system but also the thinking editor that thinks about the form,” she said.

Castro’s final segment focused on her research into the visual aspect of online news.

“When TV news got really popular,” Castro said, “the great magazines died because TV was giving people something that they used to get from Life and Look and Saturday Evening Post – the big, huge magazines. But it also started training people to think visually, to perceive visually, to process information through images.”

Newspapers, on the other hand, traditionally didn’t run big pictures, Castro said, but when television came along, people grew accustomed to seeing their news.

“The Internet has only redoubled that relationship with the visual aspects of news because the Internet is interactive,” she said. “Whenever we’re reading on the Internet, we’re reading on an electronic instrument. We’re playing at a keyboard. We’re interacting with it. We’re making choices, We’re clicking – and we’re looking.”

Pictures, headlines and graphics become doorways into your stories, Castro said.

However, with those choices, Castro said, comes greater pressure on online news providers to persuade readers to stick around.

“If I’m reading Time magazine or USA Today, I’ve already bought the whole thing. They don’t have to work real hard to get me to turn the page,” she said. “But online you have to get ’em one click at a time. And making matters worse, they may click off to somebody else’s site.”

That ability for readers to ricochet around the Web – “it’s not a quiet, orderly place” – is a difficult reality for some editors. “Control freaks don’t do too well online,” she said.

If editors learn “visual grammar,” Castro said, they

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### Castro’s 10 Steps to More Effective Online Writing

1. Begin with your main point. Make a concise, clear statement.
2. Write very tight, using perhaps half the usual words per paragraph. Semicolons need not apply.
3. Break the text into chunks of 100 to 150 words.
4. Give one idea per paragraph.
5. Make your microcontent – headlines, captions – work.
6. Write in hypertext, include useful links. A sidebar becomes a set of interactive bullets.
7. Provide searchable data and original documents, full interviews. Give context and opportunities for exploration.
8. Keep it simple. Use crisp organization and a highly readable font. Use color as navigational design. No reverse type, please.
9. Write for scannability. Highlight key terms and use bullets.
10. Invite action. Offer other material to look at, responses you are prepared to answer. Reward every click.
11. Finally, be yourself. Castro rejected the advice of “so-called experts” who claim that online communication has to be done with attitude. “No,” she said. “It has to be high quality. It has to be you. ... Voice, accuracy, reliability and trust matter more than ever.”
have a better chance of holding on to their readers.
“Every element on the screen must invite the reader in,” she said. “You buy their attention one page at a time.”

Online readers don’t read – they scan the flickering light on the screen. Their eyes are constantly in motion “like windshield wipers” until they find what they want to read. So editors must “edit to the interactive impulse” by offering clickable entries into the story.

**Research on the Internet**

The Internet is a great source of information, but most people look only on the World Wide Web, which doesn’t cover a lot of important areas such as academic research. Castro recommended copy editors give themselves a short course on Internet research with help from the book “Searching the Invisible Web” by Gary Price.

Information on the World Wide Web “is often out of date or one-sided and promotional. That’s why it’s called surfing. You’re not really digging in.”

Editors need to search beyond Google, Castro said, because search engines return “maybe 1 percent” of all available information. It’s too inefficient for search software programs to enter databases, she said, because “they’ll never find their way out.”

But search engines appear to be so complete that “we tend to forget what they’re missing.”

The Web was never conceived as a publishing medium, she said. Instead, it’s a “vast retrieval system connecting computers.” Search engines see only the surface, not the database content. In fact, she said, there are two Webs:

- The surface Web is mainly static html pages, and they’re not always up to date.
- The deep Web is database, relatively dynamic pages.
- The surface Web is mostly what someone said about something.
- The deep Web is the original information that you look for as a reporter.

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Recruiting, Training and Creating Leaders

The way the pros describe it, serious recruiting is a couple of steps shy of big game hunting.

The hunt for good copy editors requires stealth, clever tactics and perseverance, according to Walter Middlebrook, associate editor for recruitment at Newsday, and Jerry Sass, former copy desk chief at the The Oregonian and now a professor of journalism at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Successful recruiting that reaches a diverse pool of copy editors is rooted in three essentials, Middlebrook told the editors:

1. A financial commitment by the company to training and development.
2. A managerial commitment to recruitment that starts at the top, which includes identifying a single person as a linchpin, one who knows where the jobs are and can bring editors and potential hires together. That editor must then be given time to make connections and work the phones. While at The Oregonian, Sass said, he spent about a day on recruitment in every two-week stretch.
3. Commitment from individual copy desks to help reach out to the three hunting grounds that good recruiters frequent: high schools, colleges and working copy editors.

“You can’t get at kids early enough,” Sass said. “High school – you’ve got to be out there talking to them.”

Sass and Middlebrook said both of their papers work hard to maintain relationships with area high schools through workshops at the paper and classroom visits.

“The dividends these things pay are not necessarily anything you can see right away,” Sass said, “but they really pay off in the long run.” He urged editors to design high school outreach programs not just as training and recruitment efforts but also as a way to attract young readers.

“You’re attracting them not just to read the paper, but to work there,” he said. The mention of “young readers” also will catch the attention of circulation-conscious editors, Sass said.


Such efforts are time-intensive, and sometimes copy editors must participate on their own time. You might be surprised who volunteers for such programs, Sass said.

“It’s amazing how rejuvenating it can be for older copy editors, too, who you think may be near burnout,” he said.

“They just love going out. They come back re-energized for everything they do.”

Working with high schools requires time editors don’t think they have, but “it just works,” Sass said. Reward volunteers by slipping them a day off the books, or perhaps another department, such as community affairs, has money for outreach efforts. Work with the top editors to find a way to show the paper’s appreciation.

“But even if you don’t have that kind of a climate,” Sass said, “it’s incumbent on you to work to foster that kind of a climate. And it’s not impossible, even if you have a Neanderthal rock in the editor’s seat.”

The hunting ground at the college level revolves around contacts with journalism schools, student newspapers that aren’t associated with journalism schools, and job fairs. Job fairs, editors were told, is where recruiters must hone their skills.

“Most of the people who come to the national conventions don’t know how to recruit,” Middlebrook said, “and they don’t know how to use the job fair.”

Middlebrook urged editors to push for attending national conventions despite budget cutbacks because that’s where the students are. But working a job fair, he said, is more than sitting at a booth and taking applications.

“One of the first things I do as a recruiter is go around to all the booths and say, ‘What are you looking for?’” he said. By the time he sits down in his booth, he knows what all the openings are.

Middlebrook then urges young people who aren’t ready for Newsday to visit the booths of smaller papers that have appropriate jobs.

“And they’ll play me,” he said. “I love this because I can watch them the whole convention. They play me. They’re not going to do it. They’re going to spend that first two or three days working the big papers.”

By then, recruiters from smaller papers “are frustrated as hell because no one’s sitting at their desk. But that’s the day when you’re supposed to be in prime time because that’s the day when everyone’s finally had the reality check and said: ‘No, I ain’t got no job. I ain’t got no job, and I ain’t got no offers. I gotta work this room.’”

But at this point, Middlebrook warns editors from smaller papers, “you’re pissed off and you’re gone. ... I’m always the last one to leave the job fair,” which means he and fellow up-to-the-last-minute recruiters are meeting “everybody.”

“By the end of the job fair, we’re dead, but I guarantee...
you walk out of there with more information and more people,” he said, which he can use to help make connections with his counterparts in the industry – and win “brownie points” with students because he got them jobs elsewhere.

“In two or three or four years down the road when they’re ready to make their move, they will call me again and say, ‘What’s going on?’” Middlebrook said. “Now knowing what’s going on in my shop, I’ve got a better shot at trying to find a home for them. Maybe in my shop or maybe in some of the Tribune Company’s shops.”

The key, he said, is building a relationship. “There are students out there who will keep coming back. And they will keep introducing themselves. And you have to be there for them. If they don’t have what you need, guide them. Help them get to the next stage. That’s when you start the buzz, those relationships.”

Regional job fairs are also prime areas to find potential copy editors.

“The New York Times sponsors a workshop on copy editing at every convention only so that they can get a list of who those people interested in copy editing are,” Middlebrook said. “From that perspective, I hate them, but I have to applaud them.” The smart recruiters have to “infiltrate and sneak our way in” to the Times workshops to see who is participating.

With so many newspapers on the hunt, Middlebrook said, you have to become a “stealth recruiter.” Hang back and listen to the good students ask intelligent questions. Then track them down afterward. Find out what hotels they’re staying at. Slip them a card and ask them to breakfast.

“It’s ugly, but it’s war.”

Sass suggests that smaller papers can snag good candidates by trying yet another strategy, one he used when he was news editor in Salem, Ore. He would tell students this: “I know you want to talk to all the bigger papers. I know that you may end up there. I think that’s a wonderful thing as a career ambition. What I can do is function as a kind of graduate school for you. You can come here straight out of school or from another job. I can teach you as much as I possibly can. When you’ve got enough stuffed into your head that you want to try to go somewhere else, I’ll help you get a job somewhere else, at one of these bigger papers.” I used that very, very successfully and got some terrific graduates and people with a year or two of experience.

The key is to offer them a service, “even if you don’t have anything else going for you at all,” he said.

And when you do land a good intern, Middlebrook said, make sure it’s a good experience. “If you bring them in and you give them a horrible experience, then they hate you and they hate us for the rest of their careers,” he said.

Middlebrook became a “spokesman” for the students: “Be nice to us. Help us get adjusted to your shops. Help us figure out how to maneuver in your shops. Keep me busy. Challenge me. Make sure I’m busy. Don’t let me sit in a corner.”

Making mid-career hires can take patience, perseverance – and the help of a good computer system.

Middlebrook and Sass use the same tactics to find experienced copy editors at conventions that they use to find students at job fairs. “I track graduates out of colleges for years at a time until I’ve got an opening that’s suitable for them,” Sass said.

Middlebrook maintains an extensive database so that he can track people for years, often beginning when they’re interns. When department heads tell him they like an intern, he said, “I’m going to follow that person until hell freezes to make sure I’m in touch.”

But perhaps the toughest nut to crack, they said, is how the job of copy editing is perceived by journalism students. Some journalism schools have no editing courses; others have only one, and many don’t make it a requirement.

“Columbia, for instance, has none,” said Middlebrook. “This job is getting lost in the mix. So there’s nothing to attract a young person to even think about this.”

And as an industry, Middlebrook said, journalism hasn’t invested in the kinds of programs that will make an impression on young people. Other industries are “pumping big money into developmental programs, finding kids from the city and sending them into school. We are nowhere in that mix. …

“When LeBron James comes back home with his million dollars, everyone wants to be a basketball player … One of the problems with copy editing is we haven’t decided how to make this an attractive job.”

Newspapers help solve the problem when they bring high school and college students into the newsroom and let them see what copy editors do. Bring students in during the school year, Middlebrook said, “so they can go back and say ‘My God, do you know that they do this thing every night? Do you know you can sit down with the news editor and talk him out of putting a story on page one?’

As an intern in Boston, Middlebrook said, he saw such exchanges happen first-hand.

“That made me understand the power of the desk,” he said.
Fault Lines and Demographics

The nation is split along five societal fault lines – race, class, gender, generation and geography – and until the media take them into account, coverage of community and national issues will be possibly misleading and potentially inaccurate.

“It’s time for us to admit that those differences exist, to begin to understand how those five fault lines shape our perceptions of ourselves, each other and events around us,” said Dori J. Maynard, president of the Maynard Institute for Journalism Education.

Maynard offered several examples in which ignorance of the fault lines skews journalists’ perceptions. At a Poynter Institute seminar on race and the media, she said, the group saw a clip of Ted Koppel interviewing white residents of a Philadelphia neighborhood who objected to an influx of black people.

“And they were very clear about why they didn’t want black people moving into their neighborhood,” Maynard said. “They said that happens, and crime skyrockets and property prices plummet. So I’m watching this, and I’m thinking, ‘Wait a minute. There’s no context.’ And particularly from my geography of Oakland, California, I keep expecting Ted Koppel to say, ‘With all due respect, there are African-American neighborhoods in this country that are safer and more affluent than white neighborhoods.’

“He never says that. I raised it as a concern, and the conversation went in a different direction. But about five minutes later, a white male participant raises his hand, and he says he’s concerned. He’s concerned because there’s no context, and without context that clip made all white people look as if they were racists.

“So there we were. We saw the exact same clip. We had the exact same concern – that of context – but because of our fault lines perception, what we meant by context was completely different.”

Lack of meaningful context prompted her father, the late Robert C. Maynard, former owner and editor of the Oakland Tribune, to develop a framework for coverage called Fault Lines.

“Fault Lines was the last project that my father worked on before he died,” she said. “He came to it after years spent covering what he called the social earthquakes of the 1960s and ’70s while he was at the The Washington Post and then his years living with the physical earthquakes of the Bay Area.”

The Fault Lines framework urges people “to have conversations with the goal of understanding each other and not necessarily agreeing.”
Maynard’s discussions on diversity with journalists throughout the industry have convinced her that such conversations won’t be easy.

“Everyone is frustrated with the conversation around diversity, but they’re all frustrated for different reasons,” she said. The industry’s failure to meet hiring goals frustrates journalists of color; white male executives are frustrated because they don’t get credit for the progress they have made.

“White men are frustrated because they’ve had years of compliance training, diversity training and sensitivity training,” Maynard said. “They know what they can’t say. They have a set of learned responses for what they can say, but they’re terrified to speak their mind because they’re that afraid they’re going to be branded racists, so no one’s talking in our newsrooms.”

Add that to the other problems newsrooms are facing, and “it’s no wonder that we’re not accurately reflecting our communities,” she said. “We don’t have a way of talking about it so we can get that coverage into the newsroom.”

When her father broached the Fault Lines concept, Maynard admitted, it took a while to sink in.

“Before I began working on Fault Lines, I had a friend who honestly believed that Rodney King got what he deserved,” she said. “We would have these screaming fights about this.

“Then I began working on Fault Lines, and I realized I’d better practice what I preach. So I sat down and really tried to figure out why he thought the way he did. And it turned out it really was a matter of fault lines. He was slightly older than I was. He grew up where, from my perception, there was this national myth that the police were your friends. He grew up in an all-white suburb where not only were the police his friends, when they were protecting him, they were protecting him against people who looked like me.

“I grew up in New York City in the ’60s, when I think there was ample evidence that the police were not the friends of everybody,” she said. Any doubts were erased “when my father would come home from covering the civil rights movement in the South and talk about being in an all-white restaurant when the police were called. They were not called to assert his right to eat there. They were called to physically remove him.

“So we brought very different perceptions to that clip of Rodney King. I never came to agree with him, but for the first time I understood why the Simi Valley jury voted the way they did. It was that kind of nuance and texture that I wish had been in the coverage of that verdict.”

She also wishes that coverage of the riots that followed also had been nuanced.

“Instead what you saw was coverage that said, ‘Oh look. Here’s an excuse for angry black people to steal sneakers,’” she said, adding that a colleague later did a content analysis of riot coverage. “It turns out that that was an equal opportunity riot. Everybody was up in that riot. So the coverage was just inaccurate.”

Maynard suggested that journalists use the Fault Line framework in tandem with the traditional questions of who, what, when, where, why and how. Make sure that you really understand all the fault lines at work.

“Here’s a place I think where the copy desk can play such a key role,” she said. “You can help us begin to make sure that we’re looking at the right fault line.”

She cited early coverage of the 9/11 attacks in which initial stories focused on religion, instead of the more likely fault lines of geography and class.
Dori J. Maynard offered an exercise that can be used in newsrooms

Select a news story – illegal immigration, celebrity trial, war in Iraq, etc. Divide the staff into five groups and assign one of the Fault Lines – race, class, gender, generation, geography – to each group.

Ask each group to discuss the selected story from the point of view of the assigned Fault Line. How would the Fault Line group respond to the story? What perspectives would they bring? What approaches or story ideas develop out of the discussion?

For example, using the story of criminal charges against entertainer Michael Jackson, these are some of the stories that participants came up with:

**Generation:** Do those over 35, who grew up with the Jackson family, respond differently from the under 35s? Has Jackson really grown up?

**Race:** Is this a case of “another black man being brought down,” as many African Americans felt about the O.J. Simpson case? Is Michael Jackson’s support coming from all races?

**Class:** Are poor families more susceptible to letting their children go to Michael Jackson’s Neverland than rich families would be? Does class make a difference in the way parents decide with whom their children can stay?

**Gender:** Are Jackson’s supporters more female than male? Where do the mothers of Jackson’s children fit in to custody issues? Is there a societal reaction to men who stay home with children?

**Geography:** Does the perception of Jackson’s guilt vary with parts of the country? Does the national perception of California make a difference?

“If our coverage is to make sense, we need to know what fault line is at play,” she said.

Maynard also recounted an incident during a magazine writing class when a fellow student interviewed her about class and African-American issues. What do you think about the rapper Ice-T, Maynard was asked.

“Well, she was talking to my race, but my generation answered,” Maynard said. “I’m 45 years old, I don’t have any children, and I don’t think about Ice-T. Ever. Under any circumstances.”

Copy desks also can make sure that reporters don’t “blur” fault lines. “One of my pet peeves is the way right now we use geography to get at issues of race and class,” she said, such as “in the inner city,” which has become shorthand for “poor and black” or “poor and Latino.”

The flip side is “suburban,” she said, which means “white and middle class.”

“I would urge you to urge your reporters to use extra words,” Maynard said. “Describe what they’re trying to say. Let the reader make their decisions.”

As an example, she cited a newspaper where she gave a Fault Lines workshop. She asked staffers to go out into the streets and ask residents how the paper could do a better job of covering their community, which had a large immigrant population. The residents didn’t speak in Fault Line language, Maynard said, but they might as well have:

“What they were saying, essentially, is ‘Stop using your middle-class point of view to describe us. You keep calling us poor. You see two families living in one house, sharing one car, and you call us poor. Now we say we have a house and we have a car. We are not poor.’”

Often the five fault lines come together to create blind spots that don’t necessarily reflect racism or sexism.

When the President Clinton-Monica Lewinsky story broke, she heard the usual Washington, D.C., “talking heads” – mostly white, middle-aged men – speaking of moral outrage. That was not the reality in other parts of the country. Many people outside the Beltway supported Clinton. African-Americans supported Clinton. Women continued to support Clinton. People who were living better in a prospering economy supported Clinton. Yet when midterm elections came up, the Beltway pundits continued to say that the nation’s moral outrage would bring about a Republican sweep. Instead, she said, “Democrats did just fine.”

Journalists “took another hit to our credibility,” she said.

“We need to have these conversations on all of these aspects,” Maynard said. “Otherwise we’ll marginalize ourselves out of business.”
Focus on Accuracy

"Quality is an ongoing journey. It's never done," said Margaret Holt, customer service editor of the Chicago Tribune. "Just when you think you've got something fixed, it ain't. It requires vigilance, and everybody internally needs to know that it matters."

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.

Holt and other editors began to research accuracy policies, investigated quality-control programs in other industries and held meetings for employees to vent — "and boy, did they vent."

Holt discovered a guiding principle: "In any enterprise, work is a process. At any point along the way that you can identify the systemic errors versus the human errors, you can address the systemic errors and do better work."

Holt's job is to deal with errors by quantifying the process. When people make mistakes, they fill out an error form and talk about what happened to "track back on every single error."

Internal credibility is key to the Tribune's process. Editors and reporters "need to know that you value accuracy, that you care about it and that you're going to act on it."

When the Tribune launched its program, which requires naming people who make mistakes, the reaction was "ugly." Copy editors were particularly concerned.

"Everybody on the desk was terrified," Holt said, adding that they feared the program would be "one more way to do a public flogging of the desk." Reporters were thrilled, she said, because they were sure the process would reveal editors to be "jerks" who "mess with my copy."

In fact, Holt said, she found that 50 percent of errors happen at the "front end of the process," which is news-gathering. Only 15 to 18 percent of errors related to copy and source editing.

"This is not a gotcha exercise," she said. "This is our good faith effort because we want to do better work."

Tribune editors learned that the people who make the most errors are sometimes the paper's best performers. This is particularly true on the desk, where stronger editors are more likely to handle the most difficult story. And weaker writing gets a lot of editing, so more errors are likelier to slip through with good writers.

A key question on the Tribune's error forms is how the error was discovered, which is a "huge indicator of the internal awareness about accuracy and how well we're doing in the newsroom communicating it." Holt compared the percentage of internally reported errors to a good cholesterol number. When that number reaches about 35 percent, she said, "that speaks to the health of the system" because people are aware of the need for accuracy and feel free to report mistakes. However, when that number drops, the total number of errors starts to climb.

"What we're about is doing better work, not necessarily reducing the number of corrections, because they are not the same thing," she said. "What we want is a place where people feel free to talk about mistakes and that we can be candid about them and really be almost clinical on behalf of the reader so that we can learn from them and do better work."

And don't forget to correct archived stories because there is no "statute of limitations" on errors. A mistake in a previous story is likely to show up again unless it's corrected.

"The sin is not making mistakes," Holt said, because making no mistakes means that people are afraid to take risks and try something new. "The sin is not learning from them."

In addition to ongoing training for all editors, the Tribune also held training sessions in writing and in libel laws. The result was a "dramatic" decline in errors.

She sat down with one department and went over its errors for the past year, which she had categorized. The department then went through training sessions specifically aimed at preventing those errors; staffers were encouraged to share ideas for preventing errors. A columnist with 35 years of experience suggested a "blindingly obvious" strategy: "You should not ever conduct an interview until you've asked them how to spell their name and what their current title is." Despite his long service, the columnist saw the value of the training.

"We can never take these basics for granted," Holt said. "They jeopardize our business."
Preparing for 10 Years Down the Road

What were you doing professionally in 1993? That’s what Karen F. Brown Dunlap, president of The Poynter Institute, asked conference participants. Then she asked them to consider how technology has changed their work life in the decade since. Editors quickly came up with laptops, personal computers, pagination and the proliferation of cell phones. Such technology not only has made it nearly impossible to clock out of the office, as one editor said, but also has changed the way news is gathered and processed.

Now consider news-gathering in 2013.

Dunlap’s fellow panelists suggested that in the next 10 years, the news business would change just as dramatically. As immediate as today’s news is, the news cycle will grow more intense, suggested Janet Weaver, who was dean of the Poynter faculty at the time of the conference and is now managing editor of the Tampa Tribune.

“The 24-hour news cycle will be something we don’t even think about any more,” Weaver said. “In a lot of newsrooms it’s already here, and it will be in a newsroom near you very soon if it isn’t already.”

Newsrooms will become more collaborative, producing news and information instead of producing pages, she said. The lines dividing print, online and television staffs are already “starting to blur,” she said. “In a lot of operations, the walls are going to fall.”

Julie Moos, Poynter Online news editor, suggested change would come to news consumers, not just newsrooms.

“Loyalty is going to change,” she said, suggesting that as their lifestyles evolve, news consumers increasingly will turn to alternative sources of information. Specific news from specialized sources will matter more to them than the generic brand of a newspaper or television station.

Print operations aren’t the only news organizations looking for a broad delivery system. Mike Cutler, news director of News Channel 5 (WTVF) in Nashville, said his company owns the local cable news outlet as well as a Web site. “Our goal ultimately would be wherever you look for news, you’ll run into News Channel 5,” he said.

Conference participants had their own predictions:

* Wireless delivery could replace newspapers and televisions as access expands to the nearest computer.
* Reporters will carry cell phone-size cameras as news cycles disappear. News will be reported instantly by journalists who can serve all media.
* Staffing will be flexible, “morphing” into whatever team is needed for the story of the hour. Another approach driven by economics might see a two-member team – a word reporter and a visual reporter – covering a story for all news platforms in a company.

Committing financial resources to technological development is difficult, Moos said, when no one knows which technology will be needed in 10 years. Dunlap raised another question: If news is instantaneous, how do we maintain quality? Weaver agreed that despite “an ocean of information,” much of it can’t be trusted.

“The ability to provide reliable information is part of our franchise,” she said, and newsrooms always will rely on editing. Newsrooms may have to modify the workflow and reallocate the workforce, she said, but journalists don’t have to “throw away our good judgment and journalistic values as we move into this age.”

Dunlap read a prediction by Steve Outing from the textbook she wrote with Jane Harrigan, “The Editorial Eye”:

“As communications technology marches forward, consumers are getting their news in a variety of new ways. It will be the copy editor’s job to keep the content flowing in all those directions ... Copy editing always has been a vital, if underappreciated, role in a news organization. In the coming decade the copy editor’s importance – and I daresay, stature – will rise.”

Moos hoped that Outing is right because much online content is not edited.

“The Internet part of the industry is maturing,” Moos said. “In its infancy, people weren’t surprised to see typos, and they didn’t necessarily point them out or consider them notable. Over the years, we saw more and more e-mails from people who were disturbed because a name was misspelled or because there was a grammatical error or because there was another mistake.”

Few online operations have corrections policies, but Moos predicted that as reader expectations mature and online journalists become more professionally involved, such standards would be developed.

The panelists and participants agreed that training is key to bringing copy editors along as news-gathering and editing change. Sites such as poynter.org offer a great deal of content aimed at copy editors. The copy desk role is changing, and it’s important that news organizations plan for it and not just let it happen to copy editors.

“We all know how critical copy editors are to our industry’s survival,” Dori J. Maynard said during the conference wrap-up, “so I hope as we move forward, we can work together to remind the industry of that.”
**Participants and Speakers** at the **Editing the Future** Conference

Lance Bailey, news editor, Longview (Texas) News-Journal

Ralph Baldwin, news editor, The Clarion-Ledger, Jackson, Miss.

Jacqui Banaszynski, associate managing editor, The Seattle Times, and Knight Chair in Editing, University of Missouri

Janice Castro, assistant dean and director of graduate editorial programs, Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University

Charles Cooper, managing editor/news production, The Star-Ledger, Newark, N.J.

Carl M. Crothers, executive editor, Winston-Salem (N.C.) Journal

Mike Cutler, news director, News Channel 5 (WTVF), Nashville

Joe Demma, managing editor, The Modesto (Calif.) Bee

Jen Deselms, news editor, Corpus Christi (Texas) Caller-Times

Karen F. Brown Dunlap, president, The Poynter Institute, St. Petersburg, Fla.

Mitch Dydo, metropolitan copy desk chief, Chicago Tribune

Greg Farmer, assistant managing editor, The Kansas City (Mo.) Star

Shane Fitzgerald, managing editor, Corpus Christi (Texas) Caller-Times

Tom Fluharty, copy desk chief, Winston-Salem (N.C.) Journal


Bob Giles, curator, Nieman Foundation

Deborah Gump, director of Future of Editing Conference and Knight Professor of News Editing, E.W. Scripps School of Journalism, Ohio University

Margaret Holt, customer service editor, Chicago Tribune

Evelyn Hsu, Media Academy program director, Maynard Institute for Journalism Education

Don Hudson, managing editor, The Clarion-Ledger, Jackson, Miss.

Joe Hudson, senior copy desk chief, The Denver (Colo.) Post

Kay Jarvis, deputy managing editor, The Denver (Colo.) Post

Jeanne Jordan, executive news editor, Sun-Sentinel, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Beverly Kees, free-lance writer and editor, San Francisco, Calif.

Tonnya Kennedy, managing editor, The State, Columbia, S.C.

Sandra Kleinsasser, deputy features editor, Austin (Texas) American-Statesman

Jacki Levine, managing editor, The Gainesville (Fla.) Sun

Wanda Lloyd, executive editor, Montgomery Advertiser

Dave Lyghtle, assistant managing editor for news, The Modesto (Calif.) Bee

Dori J. Maynard, president and chief executive officer, Maynard Institute for Journalism Education

Sean McGrory, news editor, The Gainesville (Fla.) Sun

Paul McGrath, page one editor, Houston (Texas) Chronicle

John McIntyre, assistant managing editor, copy desk, The Baltimore (Md.) Sun

Walter T. Middlebrook, associate editor for recruitment, Newsday, Long Island, N.Y.

Julie Moos, news editor, Poynter Online

Tim Murphy, assistant managing editor, The Providence (R.I.) Journal

Bill Parker, associate managing editor for news editing, Chicago Tribune

Joel Rawson, executive editor and vice president, The Providence (R.I.) Journal


Sharon Roberts, assistant managing editor, Austin (Texas) American-Statesman

Sharon Rosenhause, managing editor, Sun-Sentinel, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

John Russial, associate professor, University of Oregon

Jerry Sass, professor of journalism at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Sherry Shephard, city editor, Longview (Texas) News-Journal

Steve Shirk, managing editor, The Kansas City (Mo.) Star


Bob Ware, copy desk chief, The Star-Ledger, Newark, N.J.

Janet Weaver, managing editor, The Tampa Tribune

Ernie Williamson, assistant managing editor, Houston (Texas) Chronicle