Fish & Wildlife Service – National Conservation Training Center
Critical Writing/Critical Thinking Follow-up Web Series
Effective Editing

Speakers:

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Rhonda Miller	=	RM
Thetis Gamberg	=	TG
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[audio start]

KM: Let's welcome Michelle Baker, from the English Department at Shepherd University here in Shepherdstown. You all remember her from the class, and we're so grateful to have Michelle continue with us on the webinar series. Welcome Michelle.

MB: Hi everybody.

[Hi.]

MB: Sounds like we've got a great group today. Karene, are we ready to go forward?

KM: We sure are. Thanks. Take it away.

MB: Fantastic. I really found a bunch of great information for you guys for today's session on effective editing. So I'm going to ask a couple of times if you have any questions about what we've gone through. And at any time, if you want to send me a chat, you can send that to me privately. You can send that to the entire list. And I'll be happy to deal with those at the natural breaking points in today's discussion.

But I just want to go ahead and get started now, because we've got such a lot of good information to cover.

The first thing I'd like to talk about is your focus as the editor of a document. When you get a document in your inbox or on your desk to edit, there are two questions that you need to ask yourself and that maybe you need to ask your colleagues. First, what kind of an edit are you being asked to do?

And I'm going to refer our attention back to the course notebook. I don't want to repeat any of the really good information that was given to us by Marty Miller or by Michael Gale, depending on the section you were in, but remember that there are two basic kinds of edits that you might be doing. One of them is a substantive edit where you are looking at the strength of the argument, the organization of the document, and the correctness and completeness of the data.

The other is the copy edit, which is the real, detailed-oriented examination of tone, the style, and then the grammar side of things where you look at the mechanics, the punctuation, and the wording.

What I encourage you to do as you ask this question, what kind of an edit am I doing, go back to the person that gave you the document and get clear with them what you're being asked to do. I think it's perfectly appropriate to say to your supervisor, what do you want me to look at? What do you want me to focus on?

Now it's possible that they say, I just want you to do everything. If that happens, then for yourself, you need to break down the editing process so that you're only focusing on one of these tasks at a time. Remember, we can't do everything at once. So structure yourself if your colleagues aren't going to give you that structure.

But it's possible, particularly if the document is coming up the chain, and a subordinate gives it to you, then you might go back to that person and say, look, we're in the early stages of drafting. Right now, I'm only going to look at your analysis and conclusions. And we're going to deal with the grammar next week. So if you can narrow that down with your co-workers, try to do that. If not, narrow it down for yourself.

That brings us to our next question. Who is the writer that you're working with, and what is your relationship to them? You'll see at the top of our chart, it's possible that you're working with peers. Sometimes you are the biological expert on a species or an ecosystem. Sometimes you're the policy expert. You know more about section 7 or ESA than anyone else in your department.

In those cases, you may have been given the document by a peer because they want you to look at your area of expertise. Again, check back in with that person and say, Jim, I'm under the assumption that you want me to review the section 7 analysis. That's what I'm going to focus on. If you want me to look at anything else, please send me a checklist and let me know what you'd like me to review. So again, when you're working with your peers, get very clear about what they're asking you to do and what you're volunteering to do.

But there's also the possibility that that document is coming up the chain from your subordinates. And the next thing I'm going to talk about is giving one-on-one feedback to a writer that you have a long-term relationship with and a developmental responsibility for, but before we do that, I want to make very clear that you're doing this only with subordinates that you have a long-term relationship with and some kind of developmental responsibility for.

If you get into this type of teaching relationship, first of all, you probably don't need to get into that teaching relationship with your peers. Other biologists and policy administrators don't need your format on some of the finer points of writing. Short-term subordinates, unless they have the opportunity to put the feedback to immediate use, aren't going to get much out of a one-on-one feedback session.

So before you engage in the kind of one-on-one feedback that we're about to talk about, make sure that you're in a long-term relationship with an employee or a co-worker that you have some responsibility for helping to foster their development.

If that is the case, then we're going to turn our spotlight to that writer / editor relationship. And again, I don't want to reiterate anything that was discussed in class. There's a lot of good information in that module. So be sure and take a look at it. But there are just a couple of points that I want to hit on today. Specifically, I have three suggestion for you for how to make these meetings as productive as possible.

Number one, separate praise from criticism. What I mean when I say that is in the way that you structure your verbal comments back to the writer, praise goes to the writer. "You did a great job tackling a really complicated issue." "You organized the document in a very effective way." "You struck a nice tone with your audience."

All of those sentences are *you* oriented. The praise goes to the writer.

Criticism goes to the document. "Section three gave me some trouble. I was confused when I read section three." "Paragraph five didn't seem to flow." "The conclusion didn't seem connected to the foregoing analysis." Again, each of those sentences is focused on the document, not the writer. We cannot ignore the fact that writing is a product of the ego. That's what gives it its power. There's a human being that created. But it's also why this one-on-one feedback is such a sensitive matter.

So give your praise to the author of the document, give your criticism to the document itself, and your feedback will be received in a more gracious way.

Number two. If you've reviewed a document and you found 25 mistakes, go back through those 25 and try to group them into categories. None of us can process 25 errors But if somebody comes back and says, out of all 25 mistakes, 15 of them were comma corrections, and 10 of those commas were with coordinating conjunctions. Then you can sit down with the writer of the document and say, "Bill, you did a great job organizing your document. I had a few comments about comma usage. If you looked up Ch. 26 of *Hacker's Writer's Reference*, you'll find a section on comma rules dealing with coordinating conjunctions. You really need to brush up on those."

That's one rule. It's not 25 mistakes that someone has to correct. So when you give the document back, look through all the corrections that you made and see if you can group some of those corrections into categories. It makes it easier to present your ideas.

Finally, and this is along the same lines—limit your feedback. Now often you're given a document that requires a holistic review, and clearly you have to make all the changes that are required. But when you're giving that one-on-one feedback to a writer that you have a long-term relationship with and a developmental responsibility for, limit your feedback to really just 3 points.

"You did a great job with this document. I'd like to see you improve your tone. I'd like to see you work on your organization. And I'd like to see you master a comma rule."

You'll notice that at least one of those comments is in that large category of the substantive edit. As much as possible, if you can keep your writer focused on the substantive side of the equation, what we find more often than not is that once we figure out the big logic problem, once we figure out the content-structure-and-organization problem, grammar falls into place almost like it's magic. We tend to make grammar errors when we are struggling with either the argument or the structure or the tone. So keep your comments there and you'll get better results.

My next comment about the writer, and this is before we move on to the document itself. So if you've got any questions, jot them down, and I'll get to them in just one second. It's all about the feedback. Again, when you're in a long-term relationship with a writer that you're trying to develop, providing them with a track changes document and asking them to make the changes is not enough. You have to reinforce that with a one-on-one in-person conference. And if you can't sit down with them in the same room, you have to do this by video. It's not enough to do it just by sound alone. That whole relationship has to be there.

Now the nice part is this relationship can always proceed in a structure. There's a very simple structure for giving this one-on-one feedback. And I recommend that you should do this at least once a week if you've got a writer in this situation. Remember, long-term relationship, developmental responsibility, once a week.

Start with the praise. You literally cannot praise writers enough. Most of us feel like we are really bad writers. I have in the 10 years that I have been doing this job, I have literally 3 times come across a student who thought they were a better writer than what they actually where, had an ego, and needed to be brought down a notch. Literally, only 3 times, and that's out of hundreds of students.

The majority of the time, you're dealing with a competent writer who feels like a bumbling fool. You have got to take that barrier away, and the only way to do that is by repeated praise. Find 3 things in that document that you absolutely love, and it won't be hard once you start looking for it.

If you're finding difficulty, go back to that rubric that we used in the class. Break it down into things like issue identification, and I'm sure that you'll find good things to say.

Praise their timeliness, their punctuality. "Thank you for getting this document to me in a timely fashion." But build that relationship with praise.

The second part of this feedback is where you really want to get into the nitty gritty. And here you need to do an analytic assessment of the document, not a holistic. You need to break the document down into its itty bitty pieces. Again, go back to the two kinds of edits-substantive and copy edit, and begin with questions of analysis, the content, the strength of the argument, and move into the organization.

I find that this section works best if you ask questions. If you say things like—"I noticed that around the time I got to page 3, my attention was beginning to wander. Did you have any difficulty writing that section?"—especially if you've done a good job praising that writer and making them feel comfortable, they'll say, "when I got to section 3, I wasn't sure whether to order the document chronologically or according to the interests of each stakeholder, and so I kind of blended those organizations, and I wasn't real happy with it."

Ask questions that will get you to the problem areas that you've already identified. The writer will first of all be able to fix those, and second, do a better job of going forward if they meet you halfway, instead of you just saying, the organization on page 3 was messed up.

Finally, always leave this feedback session with an action plan. That could take one of two forms. It may be that the document needs to be revised, and in that case, it is really easy to set up a checklist. It might be that you already had to send the document out. It's off of your desk, and there's no revision necessary. In that case, you want to set up a performance plan for that person, and say, for next week, I really want you to concentrate on this skill.

It works best if the writer establishes their own checklist. So if it's a revision checklist, say, "Candy, can you please tell me, what are the steps that you're going to take now to revise this document, and write them down so you have them with you." Let the writer write down everything they can think of. Then strike items off of their list, add items to their list, and put their list in priority order. Again, substantive edits first, copy edits second.

So let them generate the list. You delete from it, you add to it, and you put it in the right order. Again, it allows them to take responsibility for their own growth and development, and it makes sure that you're not repeating yourself all the time because they're really going to get these lessons that you give.

At this point, I'm going to shift our conversation to the editing process itself, when it's just you and the document. Before I do that, do you have any questions about this idea of working with your colleagues and giving feedback to them.

KM: Debra has a question. Debra, go ahead and unmute your phone.

DB: I do have a question. Can you hear me?

KM: Yes.

DB: My question is I just want to make sure I understand the difference between rule # 2 and # 3. Two being group your evaluation and three being limit your criticisms. I assume that in number two, you still may have a significant amount of writing, particularly if it's the same type of comma error or acronym error that's being made. But I think rule three is suggesting that they really perhaps shouldn't be as much writing on the paper.

MB: That's a great question, Debra. Thank you for asking that.

Sometimes you can't get away from the writing on the paper, especially if you're using track changes and the document is going through several layers of review. What I'm saying, I think, is let's say that you have made 50 corrections to a document, and they need to be there. That's fine. But when you give one-on-one, oral feedback to the writer, concentrate on the top 5 areas of their writing where you would like to see improvement.

So number two is that you try to group the mistakes into categories. Number three is when you do the one-on-one with the writer, limit your comments to just 3 or 5 areas of their writing. Again, be honest with them, “there was a lot more with this document that I had to change. But you and I are going to be working together for a long time. It’s too much for you to absorb in one session, and I would just like us to concentrate on these areas for right now.”

So Debra, I hope that answers your question. Do you have a follow-up, or does anyone else have a question?

KY: Michelle, this is Kristi.

MB: Hi Kristi.

KY: Hey. This is very useful for direct subordinates. Do you have any advice, or maybe this is outside of the topic, but not folks that you are directly reviewing but are a couple rows down the chain and it’s helping your subordinates identify the problems that you’re seeing as coming up through the chain. What I’m seeing a lot is that particular field offices are not catching things by the time it gets to the Regional Office. So it’s not the person writing it, it’s the person who’s doing that first level of review that I want to be working with.

MB: Right. Kristi I think the answer to that question is do you have the opportunity to sit with them in a one-on-one session and go over some of the comments that you had to make?   Because if you do that, then they can model that behavior and pass it down to their direct subordinates.

If you don’t have that relationship, and I’m going to talk about this quite a bit later in today’s call, then you need to put your yoga music on and ZEN out!

[laughter]

If you have the chance to meet with that person, then do that. But if you don’t, you might have to live with it. And you might just have to accept that and make the changes. But that would be how I make the decision.

KY: Okay. Thank you.

MB: Other questions or concerns before we move on to you and the document?

RM: Michelle, this is Rhonda. Heidi had a question. She wants to know if there are any good books that talk about this work with staff that you would recommend.

MB: Heidi, I’m so glad that you asked that question, because it leads right into the next section that we’re about to deal with. Before I answer that, let me ask if there are any other questions.

DB: I had just another quick one. This is Debra again. I am challenged on accessing the chat box.

MB: And I think Rhonda can help you to deal with that. Rhonda would you please communicate with Debra.

RM: Do you see the area where it says chat.

DB: Yes.

RM: You need to click in the box who you want to send it to, like if you want to send it to all the attendees, or just the host or Karene or Michelle. Check their name or click on their name. And then the box below, type in your question and hit send.

DB: Thank you.

MB: Thanks Rhonda, we appreciate that. Anything else?

These are great questions. Thanks so much for asking them. I just want to point out that we're not leaving the writer 100%. Let me get into this next section, and maybe you'll see what it is that we're talking about.

Heidi, in answer to your question, there is the most amazing book that I found recently thanks to Deb Parker, and I'm so sorry that she's not on this call today, because I just really want to give her all kinds of kudos and praise her for directing me to this resource. Carol Fisher Saller is the lady that you see in front of you, and you may be able to see in the Window behind her, the word University. That's because Carol Fisher Saller is the Chief Manuscript Editor for the University of Chicago press. She runs their online blog, their question and answer site for editors. And she has written this amazing book called *The Subversive Copy Editor.*

On the final page of our PowerPoint slide, I have the bibliographic information for her book, and also some of the resources that she mentions including some online editors' roundtables where you can go in and ask quick grammar, style, or editing questions from other editors like yourselves. I am completely in love with her approach, and the rest of our discussion today is going to focus on her work and her suggestions.

She's writing to a particular kind of editor, obviously. The three types that she identifies are newspaper and magazine editors, book editors who are working in a contractual relationship with an author, and freelance editors who have been hired by larger companies. For most of you, you're working in a very complicated colleague—co-worker—subordinate setting. And so you've got a layer of personnel issues on top of what she describes in her book. But still, I do think her book is a great resource and that's where we're going to look at today.

We just had the spotlight on the writer, and if you guess where the spotlight should go next, you might want to say the document. But what I love about Saller's approach is that when you're sitting alone in your office with the manuscript, your spotlight should be on the reader. And this is just, I think, fantastic. Every decision you make as the editor of that document needs to be reader-oriented.

Let's go through a few examples. She has three cardinal rules for editing documents. They are: be careful, be transparent, and be flexible. We're going to go through each of these in detail, and I'll ask for questions after each section so you have a good understanding of all of them.

The reason we have to be careful—and what being careful really means is being right—if we as the editor make a comma change to the document, it had better not be because we want a comma to be there. It had better be because the comma belongs there. And that's what she means by being careful.

The reason for that is first of all, the grammar has to be precise if the reader is going to understand the content. Second, the style has to be consistent if the reader is going to process the content. And third, and this comes back to that ZEN point, sometimes we may have to break our own rules for the sake of clarity and communication. So keep that reader always in the forefront of your mind when you are editing your documents.

Let's talk about care in a little more detail. Her first rule for care is DO NO HARM. She argues that the reason why editors actually screw up a document comes from three different sources. Number one, if we are ignorant of grammar or style, we will throw commas in, we will break paragraphs, we will change spacing, and we are doing more harm than we are good. Number two, we sometimes confuse grammar with style. And we make changes that are actually personal preferences, but we give them the status of rules. Remember our very first webinar, which was on the GPO style manual. If you just want to review the first 10 minutes of that discussion and remember the difference between grammar and style so that you know, when can you be flexible, and when do you really have to be rigid.

And then finally, and we've all worked with editors like this, there are some that enjoy the power trip and that do the document harm because of that. Saller encourages us as editors to look at our own practices very carefully and make sure that we are not guilty of any of these errors.

Next, she makes several suggestions for care. And her first one is one that I could not have said better myself. And as a matter fact, I think I did say it about 5 times during the week that we were together. Get a grammar handbook and use it. When you make a comma change, make sure that it's the right comma change. Refer to your grammar handbook all the time, and make sure that you're using the same one that your peers and colleagues are. When you have that initial conversation, say for the grammar check, I'm using Diana Hacker's *Writer's Reference*. If you have a different grammar handbook, you may want to get this one, or I'll be happy to send you my copy when I send the document down the hall.

Second, know your style manual. I went through a lot of information in that first webinar about how to browse your style manual and how to get comfortable with it. Saller with all of her wit and humor and good grace is actually much more hardcore than I am. She insists that we as editors READ our style manual, cover to cover. And she provides no excuses for not knowing it inside and out, especially when we're supposed to be teaching it to others.

Now again, if that's not your responsibility in the editing process, make that really clear up front. Tell your colleagues, your supervisors, I'm not doing a style check because

I'm not a Federal Register person. This is going to go to a Federal Register editor, and I'm not going to do that in this review. But if you're doing it, do it right.

Third, post tips on your chalkboard, on your corkboard, on your computer screen until you've mastered them, and then put up new ones. Every Monday at lunch time, find yourself one new tip and put it up there.

Fourth, figure out the right answer, which we've talked about. Refer to your grammar handbook, know your style manual, but—and this is another thing I love about Saller—know the right way to do it. Saller insists that we as editors, especially in today's age which is completely technology-oriented and which is only going more and more in that direction, that we know our editing software inside and out. And on that resource page at the end of today's discussion, I'm going to give you a site to go to for information on Word and how to really use that program to the best of your ability.

Saller, and maybe she's more detail-oriented than what any of us want to be, but she freely acknowledges that she will spend three hours learning how to do something in Word instead of spending 1 hour doing it the long way around, because this is her job and she wants to do it well in the future, not just do it well today. I just think that's a great approach.

Alright, so these are all of the ways that we need to be careful. That we need to be very sure that the advice, the corrections that we make are right. Otherwise we do loads of damage to ourselves, to our relationships with our colleagues, and most importantly to the reader. Any questions about care before we move on to transparency?

Alright, well then let's take a look at the next of her three cardinal rules. Transparency is really all about communication, clear constant communication between the editor, the author, and anyone else who is vital to the chain. Saller recommends that the communication happen in three layers—I, you, and we.

Jim, thank you for sending me this document. I am now going to check the quality of your argument and the validity of your conclusion. While I'm doing that, would you please update the Works Cited list to make sure that all of our references are 100% accurate, and then we will meet together on March 31st to begin the next stage of review.

Do you see how that commentary was I, you, we? I'm going to do this. You are going to do this. And next we together are going to do this.

All of your communication with the author of that document needs to take this format. Or perhaps your supervisor is the person that has given you that document to review. This I, you, we structure.

Second element in transparency. I've got just 6 tips for you here in your communication. Number 1, again, this is from Saller's perspective, and it may or may not be appropriate for you in your position. Saller assumes that the author is the content expert. Now it may be, especially if you're at that peer level, that you are the biological content expert. But is the author an expert in perhaps the relationship between this NGO and the FWS? If so, then all questions of tone and style need to be referred back to the author. You shouldn't be making those decisions.

Go back to those first questions we asked—what are you being asked to edit, and what is your relationship to the writer? It may be that you are the content expert, but it may be for only a limited part of the document.

Second, ask before making major changes. If you think that the Latin name of the species is incorrect, and you're going to sweeping change it throughout the entire document, wouldn't it be a good idea to check with the author before you do that? Because maybe there's another species out there that you've never heard of before, and that they're actually writing on. Those kind of mistakes happen all the time, so ask before you make major changes to the document.

Also, that is going to foster a relationship of respect that becomes mutual between you and your co-workers. Because if you're tired of getting documents that are crappy, and you start asking these kinds of questions, you might bring it to their level of awareness that, "wow. I really didn't look at the consistency of my pronoun references before I sent that document on. I should probably do a better job of it before I waste Kristi's time with this." If you respect your author, they're going to in turn start to respect you and your time. Just be totally open about what your editing process is.

Number three, don't make silent changes. We all know the benefits and the hassles of track changes, and we also know that when we get a document in track changes, we have the option to turn track changes off, and we can go through that document, and we can silently change all the dates to be European style instead of American. We don't like October 13, 1997. We like 13 October 1997. So we change it the whole way through the document with track changes off.

That's just frankly inconsiderate. Again, if you foster that relationship of respect with your author, they will pick up on that. But if you make those silent changes, you're in for a world of trouble.

Number four, I can't emphasize it enough. Clear, constant communication. Number five, you know all about maintaining your professional demeanor. But number six, learn to say yes.

So often we look at a document, and we say, this is terrible. It needs to go in a different fashion, and the author comes back and says, but I really like it this way, and I worked so hard to make it that way. Before you say no, before you change it, go back to those three elements, those three cardinal rules, and the reader. Is the grammar imprecise? If the answer is no, then is the style inconsistent? No maybe it's inconsistent with the GPO style manual, and you're a GPO guru, and you want it to be perfect, but this document's not going into the federal register. It's a private communication—well as private as government works. It's a communication between you and an NGO. Does it have to be in GPO style? Why do you have to get your way all the time? Maybe the reader doesn't need it.

So transparency consists of all of these things. And I think what we're really talking about here is fostering that special relationship between you and your writers. Alright folks, that's transparency. Before we move into flexibility, do we have any questions or concerns, any comments or personal experiences?

TG: I'm just really glad my supervisor's not on this call.

MB: Why is that Thetis?

TG: It'll take me a while to put all of these in practice, that's all.

MB: Exactly. And work on a little piece at a time. Set yourself one goal for this week. Just one goal. And like Karene said, this material is going to be up on the website. Next week, flip back through the PowerPoint and write down one more goal.

KY: This is Kristi. One thing I'd suggest, kind of related to don't make silent changes, set up a process so that the document ends up back to the original author at some point before it goes out. We've had situations where things are edited along the way, and then it gets signed and sent out, and the original author realizes that some important content thing got lost. The letter that no longer says what it was supposed to say.

MB: That is so scary. Thank you for sharing that.

KY: It's sort of silent changes.

MB: It's silent if the author doesn't know that they're happening, right?

KY: Yeah, basically. It's not like they're, you talk about the inconsiderate, not showing the changes in the document. The original author is not getting a chance to see the final version and say, yeah, these are okay edits. And it's also getting to your content issues that you need to ask if you are making those content changes.

MB: Very good. Thanks for that Kristi. Anybody else want to share or ask a question before we move onto flexibility.

H: This is Heidi. I do have a question. One of the things my staff continually complain about is I think figuring out some way to keep track of all the changes that are made on the various Federal Register documents. What I've been recommending to them to do is make a checklist and keep it next to your desk. And I keep telling them, that's the best way that works for me. That's what I like to do. But I'm wondering if there are any other ideas out there besides just keeping a regular checklist for those people that just operate differently.

MB: Heidi, can I ask you, what kinds of changes are you referring to? Are you referring to changes inside of a document, or are you referring to changes in Federal Register style?

H: I'm referring to changes inside of a document from grammar stuff to sentence structure. I've got certain stuff that keep doing the same things over and over again. That's why I suggested they keep the checklist.

MB: That's a great suggestion. What I would suggest is have more than one checklist. Have, for example, one checklist for the Federal Register, and another checklist for maybe you have another supervisor who has a different style and prefers documents to be sent out in a specific way and that's different than the Federal Register.

If you are in that position, my recommendation is write or edit the document the way that it is most reasonable for you and the reader. And then do a final proof before you send it out for the Federal Register quirk, or for Bill's quirk.

The other suggestion that Saller makes is to keep either different files or folders for different versions of the document. So if I send my comprehensive plan to Kristi and to Deb, and I ask Kristi to look at the conclusion and Deb to look at the grammar, then I want to save a Kristi copy of the document, and a Deb copy of the document, so that when they come back, I can track Kristi's changes separately from Deb's, and then merge the two documents into one. And we are going to talk at the end of today's call about document management.

Any other questions or comments before we move onto flexibility?

Great. Let's take a look at the three cardinal rules of flexibility, which are pretty common sense and are pretty quick. Number one, pick your battles. Even if you know for sure that it is wrong, is this person in a power relationship over you, and is an evaluation coming up next week? Might not be the best idea to be bringing that up right at this moment. Or, maybe you're in a relationship with a subordinate, and they have just been beaten down and beaten down and beaten down. Do you really need to press the comma issue right now, or can you just let that go until they're better able to handle that next week. Or maybe you have already won 3 out of 5 arguments on this document and they were the big ones. Let something small go so you get your way on the content and the organization.

We all make mistakes. You will gain respect from your subordinates and your supervisors if you admit your mistakes. We are seeing this over and over again in today's social media. The ways that large corporations and politicians are using things like Twitter and Flickr and Squidoo. What we see over and over and over again is even when people make mistakes, if they admit them quickly and put a plan in action to correct them, others are willing to forgive us. So admit when you've made a mistake, and be very honest about it.

Finally, ask for help. If your supervisor has given you a document. They've said, I want a complete review by Friday of this week. It's Wednesday. You do the analysis and the conclusion section on Wednesday, and by Thursday at noon you're not done. You need to get back in touch with that supervisor and say, "Friday is looking like an unrealistic deadlines. Here are the problems that I'm running into. Can you give me one person to maybe check the references so that the Works Cited comes in clean. And then I can concentrate my efforts on the organization of the document for the next…"

So recognize when those situations come around and ask for them. Part of being flexible is recognizing that there are times when you're going to disagree with others in this process, either the author or a supervisory editor down the chain. When that happens, don't keep harping on the problem. "But section 5 is out of place, section 5 is out of place, section 5 is out of place." By the third time you've said that, they know it, but they may not where or still be hearing that why. Explain your reasoning.

"If section 5, it's too late in the document for the reader to care. We have not given the reader enough to care about early up front, and that's why I want to move section 5." So do you see how that comment was in terms of the reader? Why is this a problem in comprehension, in communication? Keep it reader-focused, and then ask for a solution. "I understand that maybe you don't want to move section 5 to the beginning, but what can we do to create a sense of urgency and to keep a reader engaged in this document until they get to section 5?" You'll be surprised with what kind of creative answers you get. Things that you had never even thought of. Your writers, people in your chain of command will come up with good ideas to help you fix the problem. They can't do that until you articulate the problem. So in terms of the reader, tell them why you're worried.

Those are the three cardinal rules—carefulness, transparency, and flexibility. I'm now going to talk about dangerous manuscripts, the ZEN of editing, and document management. Unless you have any questions that is three cardinal rules—carefulness, transparency, and flexibility.

KM: Michelle, I just have a comment on how interesting it is that the more you know about a subject, perhaps the less dogmatic your opinions. And that rules can be bent for the sake of your relationship and for the reader, especially. And that's just a really neat new message for me. So thank you.

MB: I'm glad I could give you something new today, Karene. Other comments or question?

Alright, let's take a look at these last couple of topics. Saller identifies two times when manuscripts get dangerous, and I'm talking here about big manuscripts, 300, 500 page documents. Things like the Refuge Plans or the Comprehensive Conservation Plans. There are two times when those edits get really scary, when you could make huge mistakes. Let me give you an example. I have a friend that was writing a dissertation on Hebrew poetry, and he had made all the final changes, and he was obviously not a native English speaker. He was a native Hebrew speaker. So he wasn't real confident in his writing. And he went into Word and he hit *spell check*, and then he hit *accept all changes*. And all the beautiful Hebrew poetry that he had included in his dissertation was changed into garbled English, and he saved it.

That was a dangerous manuscript. That is a time when you are capable of making a big, irreversible mistake. So the first one of these she identifies is mindless tasks. Do you have to renumber all the footnotes, and there are 800 of them? That is a mindless task. And so she has four suggestions that are really self-explanatory. If you can automate that process, do. Go spend 3 hours poking around on Google and find out how to do a footnote find and replace in Word. If you can't, delegate it. Find an intern in your office that needs something to do. And then, if you can't do that, which I think it's interesting she put that one second, but if you can't do that, reevaluate. Do the footnotes really have to be redone? Are they comprehensible the way they are? Even if they're not perfect, maybe they're not GPO style, but are they readable, are they intelligible? Then leave them alone.

But if you can't, then close your office door, put on your music, chill a bottle of wine. Don't drink it while you're doing the task, but save it for later, and just do it. Accept that fate. I also liked that all four of those rhymed, which I thought was kind of clever.

The other dangerous manuscript is when you have a complex task. And Saller gives a really good example of this one. She had a manuscript in which the author referred to God with capital pronouns He and Him. University of Chicago style is not to do that, so she uncapitalized all the pronouns throughout the whole text.

She got to the end, and there was a footnote in the conclusion in which the author said that his mother on her deathbed had begged him that every time he referred to God in writing he would capitalize the pronoun. Whoops. She had to go back through the text, manually. Because of course, there are times when the word "he" does not refer to God. Manually check each pronoun reference and decide whether it had to be capitalized or not.

That is a dangerous manuscript because it is a complicated task. You have to engage your brain, but at the same time, it's so repetitive. So she asks these three questions—is it wrong? Is it confusing? And is it ugly? All of which relate back to that reader question. Is it going to cause problems for the reader, and in that case it becomes a big problem for the author. And as a matter of respect, she had to go back and change that.

So when that happens, we need to all put ourselves in our ZEN spot, however, may choose to do so. Editing is very naturally a detail-oriented process, and we are great at being detail-oriented. But when we're in the game, sometimes we just need to sit down and see what we have created and as Karene just said, let some of those rules go by the wayside.

So, let's talk finally about document management. I'm going to go through this really quickly because you guys are experts at this already. You know that you need to keep folders upon folders upon folders. Working copies, manuscript copies, the one that has been surnamed needs to be in its own copy, so make yourself lots of different folders to file all of this information.

She has a great idea that your master working copy needs to be saved as a Read Only file. That way you can't make any changes to it, accidentally or otherwise. Always keep your master working copy in a Read Only file.

On those large documents, she also suggests, the final document may actually have 4 or 5 or 10 files. For example, the Works Cited list is a separate file. All of these tables are in separate files. All of the figures are in separate files. She suggests that you make one working copy with all of those together in one Word file, and the reason for that is the ease of searching. It's a lot easier to search a single document in Word than it is to use Windows Explorer or My Computer search functions and try to do a whole folder full of information. So just for your own record-keeping purposes, if you have to search something, but everything together in one file so you can do that easily.

She recommends not using Word's multiple versions as one program, because Word saves all the multiple versions as one file, which means it is very easy to lose. If you're going to make a big edit, like if you're going to do a find and replace throughout an entire document, she suggests that you save the document under a new name and do a trial run before you start messing around with that master copy.

She also suggests that you take trial runs, working copies, other folks' edits, and put those documents either in a different font or a different color, which I think is just a great idea. We have all been in the middle of an in-depth edit. It's in somebody else's file. We get up for a cup of coffee. Next thing you know, we're gone from our desks for 20 minutes. We come back, and we forgot that this is Kristi's copy of the file. We start making changes away, and we don't know. Put it in an olive green, and suddenly you remember. This is Kristi's file.

She is a big advocate of keeping your technology clean. When you make changes, when you insert new stuff, get all of those little formatting marks out of there. Keep your technological documents as clean as possible. And then finally, back up, back up, back up.

And that brings us to the end of today's discussion. Saller's book is listed there ate the top of your resources section. Also, I thought some of you might be able to use, you probably already have, Zweifel's Handbook of Biological Illustrations. If you need to scan and insert pictures into your documents. And then there a couple of websites there. Two of them are for editors. The Edgsguild.org is a great site. Also Geoff Hart has done a really good job helping us save paper and do our editing on-screen instead of by hand. And finally there is a source there for all of us Word aficionados who want to understand our technology better and streamline our process as much as possible.

So we've got just a little bit of time if you'd like to share any questions or concerns. Or maybe you've got some great tips for editing that you'd like to share with the people that are on the call today.

TG: I found this session very helpful.

MB: So glad to hear it.

H: Yes. Thank you very much.

KM: Alright. Well thank you Michelle. And we'll send the PowerPoint to everyone who was on the call so that you can have these references and resources.

Be sure to join us next month for the next webinar. That'll be on Tuesday, April 20th, when Michelle will share with us the finer points of Usage, and it will include all of the common mistakes, possibly, that the FWS writers make regarding commas and commonly confused words, and we might even hear about the ZEN of usage. Anything else you'd like to add, Michelle?

MB: No. This was great. Thank you guys so much for letting me share this with you today. I hope that it helped.

KM: Well hang on the line for any lingering questions. So Cecilia, if you have one, that would be fine.

C: I do have one. The reference, I think here name is Diana Hacker, I just wanted to get the reference for the book that mentioned.

KM: Oh, Carol Fisher Saller, that's the first reference there, *The Subversive Copy Editor*. And then the other reference was Diana Hacker, and that's that book that we used in class.

KM: Do you have that reference handy, Michelle?

MB: I just logged onto my computer, and what I'm getting for your Cecilia is the webpage that you just go ahead and cut and past into your browser and get the information for that book. So Cecilia, yeah, did you just get that.

C: Let me go to my email.

MB: Actually, I sent it to you on WebEx in the chat.

C: Yes I see it. Got it.

MB: Good. I find that her grammar handbook is really very user-friendly. It's got the nice tabs on the side and a great index.

C: I had one before, and I moved, and it just evaporated. So I'm trying to replace.

MB: Good. Yeah, used copies are readily available on Amazon for real cheap.

C: Good deal. Thank you.

MB: You're welcome.

[audio end]