Saturday 10 September
Style Council Program Overview

Venue:

Mitchell Theatre, first floor
Sydney Mechanics School of Arts
280 Pitt Street, Sydney
(between Park Street and Bathurst Street)

Times	Session
9.00 – 9.10	Registration
9.10 – 9.10	Conference Welcome
9.15 – 10.45	Session 1: Updating the *Australian Government Style Guide*
	Pam Peters, Loma Snooks and David Whitbread Chair: Heather Cam
10.45 – 11.15	Morning tea
11.15 – 12.45	Session 2: New frontiers for communicators and editors
	Judy Knighton, on the transliterate scribe Jennifer Blunden, on the semiotics of punctuation Juliet Richters and William Laing, on the survey questionnaire as communication: a role for editors Chair: Adam Smith
12.45 – 2.00	Lunch
2.00 – 3.00	Session 3: Benchmarks in plain English
	Susan McKerihan, on plain English in Australian business Howard Warner, on smart sentences Chair: Neil James
3.00 – 3.15	Short break: ABC set up for Session 4
3.15 – 4.45	Session 4: Panel and Public Forum on: 'Are the mass media the clearinghouses of usage?' Supported by the CAL Cultural Fund, to be recorded by the ABC for broadcast
	David Astle, Kate Burridge and Julian Burnside Chair: Alan Sunderland
7.00 – 10.00	Dinner Emperor's Choice Restaurant, 261 George Street Cost $50, drinks not included, to be paid when registering at 9.00 am at the registration desk

Session 1: Updating the *Australian Government Style Manual*

Panelist 1: Pam Peters
Changing contexts for the *Style Manual*

The history of the *Style Manual* through its six editions (1966-2002) shows it continually responding to changes in Australian society and culture:

• cultural changes: franchising of Aborigines (in the 1960s), decimal currency and metrification (1970s), the inclusive language movement (1980s), restructuring of the publishing industry (1990s), technological changes in communication (2000s) – all these have affected the size, structure and contents of Manual.

• expanding readerships for the *Style Manual* since 1966 – well beyond federal government. The Manual is now used much more widely, in Australian state governments, in educational publishing houses and by metropolitan newspapers – even if the editor-in-chief reserves the right to dictate some very particular points of style. Corporate editors refer to the *Style Manual* in producing their annual reports, and academic writers find it a useful reference for journal articles and dissertations. The only types of institutional document on which the *Style Manual* does not advise its readers are brochures, business correspondence.

• linguistic changes in English usage here. Since 1960s Australian English has established its independence from British English, though it still has much in common with it. Meanwhile millennial expansion of the internet and global communication exposes Australians to English from all quarters of the world. The need to edit documents for both Australian and overseas readers is a new challenge.

In the preparation of the 6th edition of the *Style Manual* we found plenty of language changes to respond to and incorporate (in the 14 year interval since the last major revision (1988)). Substantial linguistic research was carried out to identify trends in Australian usage. Ongoing changes were discussed and embodied in the text and or marginal notes, since they are at play in the Australian community. The 6th edition couldn't just prescribe 'government style' as in the days of AGPS. It had to contain style advice which dovetailed with the publication type, its readership, and its normal mode of expression (formal, standard, informal).

At this point in time, it's close to 10 years since the last update of *Style Manual*. Changes in the cultural, technological and linguistic context continue. Research among readers of Australian Style has already identified changing elements of language which need to be incorporated in the future 7th edition. There are details to revise in the treatment of numbers and measurements, noted by CSIRO correspondents. The question of Australian vs. international norms needs revisiting in many areas. So updating the Manual's content and design is again a large, multifaceted project. As before, it calls for a range of expertise, strong project management, and no less research than for the 6th edition.

Pam Peters is an Emeritus Professor in Linguistics at Macquarie University, and consultant to its Postgraduate Program in Editing and Publishing. She contributed six chapters to the 6th edition (2002) of the *Australian Government Style Manual* (John Wiley, 2002). Her own major publications include the *Cambridge Guide to English Usage* (2004), and the *Cambridge Guide to Australian English Usage* (2007), the second edition of the *Cambridge Australian English Style Guide* (1995). She has been a member of the ABC's Standing Committee on Spoken English since 1966.

Panelist 2: Loma Snooks
Revising the Style Manual in an outsourced environment

The 6th edition of the *Style Manual* was the first to be undertaken as an outsourced contract; all previous editions had been produced in-house by AGPS (the Australian Government Publishing Service). This new situation reflected the Commonwealth's decision that publishing should not be considered a core government activity. A result of this decision was the closure of AGPS – and, with it, the demise of a centralised approach to the editing, design and production of government publications. The levels of commitment and funding readily available for updating the manual also declined, as did the number of experienced publishing staff within government departments.

The process under which the 6th edition was prepared therefore differed markedly from the way in which previous editions had been produced. For a start, we had to assemble an expert team to develop an approach we thought best suited the times, and to win the contract in a highly competitive environment.

We knew that the manual's audience was changing. With the increase in publishing projects being outsourced to freelance editors and designers (not only by government but also by publishing houses, institutions and the corporate sector), we saw the need for the manual to explain the processes involved in publishing in greater detail. Freelances working separately needed to be conversant with the timing and nature of inputs required from others as part of a publishing project. Also, many people commissioning a publication lacked the experience to judge the time, skills and processes required to produce a professional result. So we felt the focus of the manual should be expanded to fill these gaps. As well, the publishing industry was being radically reshaped by technology. Desktop publishing, digital printing and electronic communications were all affecting the ways in which material needed to be written, edited, designed and published.

Lengthy team discussions and negotiations with our client therefore ensued about the content and format of the work, the likely percentage of existing content to new or

substantially revised material, and the time the project was estimated to take. We then settled on a contract to prepare two versions of the manual: a short, electronic version and a more lengthy printed manual. However, the scope and timing of a complex project such as this involving wide-ranging initial research are difficult to tie down at the outset. So, inevitably, there were some changes along the way.

The concept of the short electronic version was dropped in order to fund a much greater proportion of new material, with the 6th edition ending up with 82 more pages than the 5th edition (an expansion of around 18 per cent). The ratio of existing to new or substantially revised material also altered significantly: our initial estimate of 70:30 for existing vs new/revised material fell to 30:70 at the end, indicating the extent of the major changes and additions involved.

So it was an interesting challenge to manage the project under continually changing circumstances ¬– which also included a series of personnel changes in our client's team to whom we reported. But as the context for the development of a 7th edition is likely to be undertaken within a similar context, I thought it would be useful to review some of the management aspects relating to our team's structure and responsibilities, the way in which we developed and integrated content and design, and the review processes undertaken both within our team and by the client and its appointed expert panel.

Loma Snooks headed the Snooks & Co. team responsible for preparing the 6th edition of the *Australian Government Style Manual*. Other career highlights include developing and leading a large team of editors and designers working in Australia, the US and Asia on high-profile public reports (1981–97), and creating and managing the publications unit for the newly commercialised Australian Government Solicitor (2003–10). She is an Honorary Life Member of the Canberra Society of Editors, an author of Australian Standards for Editing Practice (2001), and a contributor to the development of IPEd's accreditation process.

Panelist 3: David Whitbread
Revolutionising the design of the *Style Manual*

The design of the 6th edition was rebuilt from the ground up. The brief was to design it for both print and online versions – and to celebrate the Centenary of Australian Federation (look at the use of the Federation star from the cover throughout). The online version did not eventuate but you can see a number of hints as to what it may have been like in the print publication.

There is a direct correlation between the navigation elements used in websites and the design of part and chapter openings in the printed edition. There are numerous levels of drop-down menus. There are arrow icons used for cross-references which would be hyperlinks online. Even 'About' pages contain a hint as to the nature of the likely animation and video elements. And the heading hierarchy and regularity are more like the chunking and

labelling of online content. The paragraph numbering of previous editions was removed partly because it is anachronistic online. The resources are listed throughout instead of a single bibliography in endmatter.

Particularly in the production chapters, there was the intent to provide video clips showing processes like hardback binding and offset printing. In Chapter 21, on page 376, it is demonstrated how the manuscript would have been reviewed and marked to identify possibilities for images, sound and video files in an example using the first page of the Constitution (another reference to Federation). Icons were created that are similar to the sort of icons used online for such elements. This process was used to identify possible images in the writing and editing chapters as well. As an example, see page 146 for the image from Sir Robert Helpmann's ballet, *The display*.

The design of each edition has looked at the technology of publishing at the time, and where it is likely to be headed, to create an appropriate and authoritative reference that demonstrates what it discusses. The 6th edition was no different. For the first time, it incorporated advice for both online and print publishing throughout all chapters, rather than relegating online production to a single chapter. This reflected the reality that there were now dual requirements and they were likely to continue into the future.

But while the 6th edition did not have an online equivalent as intended, any future editions would probably be looking at an online version as the priority format with a possible print version, such is the change in reference publishing since 2002.

There are further possibilities to look at as well. Maybe apps could be developed for different editorial processes or to analyse text in different ways. Maybe there could be downloadable templates and style sheets for different types of publications. Maybe there would be interactive elements like blogs or surveys to capture input for future updates. Maybe...

David Whitbread is the author of *The design manual* (UNSW Press, 2001) which won an Australian Award for Excellence in Educational Publishing in 2002. The 2nd revised and expanded edition was released in 2009. He also wrote seven chapters, revised some other chapters and art directed the 6th edition of the *Australian Government Style Manual* (Wiley, 2002). Formerly Design Director of the Australian Government Publishing Service where he designed the 4th edition of the *Australian Government Style Manual* (1988), he was also Head of Graphic Design at the University of Canberra. He is currently the Corporate Communications Manager at an Australian Government agency in Canberra.

Session 2: New frontiers for communicators and educators

Panelist 1: Judith Knighton
The transliterate scribe

What would professional editors do in a future where prose literacy is obsolete? This paper explores some possible implications of a post-literate, wired, society.

In the future, voice and touch-based technologies will spread news and knowledge in ways that don't depend on years of reading practice. The effects of this may be as dramatic as the effect of the technology (the printing press) that led to today's literacy levels.

Today's educational emphasis is on transliteracy; that is, literacy in a wide range of platforms, tools, and media: from signing and orality, through handwriting, print, TV, radio, and film, to digital social networks. This broad emphasis reduces the time for reading practice, and the effect is compounded by the trend towards reducing texts to bullet points and snappy paragraphs for web delivery.

At present, just over 40 per cent of adults in Australia and New Zealand cannot read or write well enough to manage basic tasks in their every day environment. In the future, they may be able to manage those tasks without reading or writing.

The current skills of professional editors – such as plain language editing, creating authoritative summaries, and managing production processes– will still be needed in a post-literate world. Even if voice-delivered, a report, manual, letter, or book will need to be structured and scripted before it can be spoken. But such skills won't be enough on their own.

New roles will include publishing in the right channels and tools from the dizzying number available, effectively multi-purposing source information, and building circumscribed structured environments that provide sufficient context for good decision-making.

This paper discusses how professional editors – who are already specialists in creating environments for knowledge transfer using today's technology – can step into the roles created by the new technologies.

Judy Knighton has been a researcher, writer, editor and publications developer of government and corporate documents for more than thirty years. Her editorial experience on projects of all sizes includes the high-profile *Report of the New Zealand Royal Commission on Genetic Modification*. In her current role as a Plain English Consultant for Write Limited, she writes and edits print and online documents for a wide range of organisations and audiences. Most recently, she has managed production of more than 400 individual training documents for five qualifications in an industry where many trainees are literacy-challenged. Judy holds a Masters of Communication (with distinction) from Victoria University of Wellington

(2003), and is Accredited in Public Relations (2008). Her most recent conference presentations were at the New Zealand Strategic Communications Conference in 2008 and 2009, and at the New Zealand Internal Communications Conference in 2007.

Panelist 2: Jennifer Blunden
What's the point? The meanings and madness of punctuation

The role of punctuation in managing the flow of meaning in written language is detailed and discussed in countless books and guides on writing, grammar and style. But while the syntactic and grammatical functions of punctuation are well understood, what other meanings does punctuation construe in written texts?

As most editors will attest, it is often some of the tiniest editorial changes (a full stop here or particular capital there) that are the most contested. Why? What meanings do punctuation marks and style choices have for writers? And for readers? With the perspective of 30 years since the informal turn in punctuation gathered pace in the 1980s, this presentation will look at the meanings generated in this surprisingly heady mix of tradition and fashion, emotion, authority and identity – both personal and professional.

Jennifer Blunden is a writer and editor who specialises in developing texts for public audiences, particularly in museums and galleries. She was formerly the senior exhibitions editor at Sydney's Powerhouse Museum and Art Gallery of NSW. She currently consults to a number of cultural institutions and is undertaking a PhD at UTS into language and learning in museum exhibitions.

Panelist 3: Juliet Richters & William Laing
The survey questionnaire as communication: a role for editors

A huge amount of public health, social and Census data is collected through the medium of the questionnaire, whether it is completed on paper by the interviewer or the respondent, or by telephone interview, or by computer. Health and social science methodology textbooks explain validity and reliability of measures and so on, but give less attention to the written questionnaire or spoken interview as a linguistic interaction.

Although survey research teams are often multidisciplinary, including epidemiologists, sociologists, psychologists and/or demographers, they rarely seek to include linguistic expertise. We argue that the use of multiple questions on the same topic, together with factor analysis to interpret the results, is a maladaptive response to the intrinsic problems of ambiguity and interpretation in question wording. Rather than wearying respondents with repetitive or confusing questions, survey researchers would do well to engage

editors as part of their research teams to improve their questionnaires.

Questionnaires can suffer from a lack of structural editing. Where more than one research topic is being addressed (say, sexual health, falls, diet and exercise, alcohol consumption), bridging material can help interviewees understand the purpose of each batch of questions and remove jarring transitions that distract or confuse both respondents and interviewers.

Phone survey questionnaires have particular editorial issues of their own; they are not forms for filling in. Noncolloquial usages make it difficult or impossible for interviewers to ask the question as written, with effects on the attitude of both sides of the interaction, and on data accuracy. Grammar, wording and intonation must be appropriate for aural comprehension. Phonological problems are significant: jarring or obscure combinations slow the interview and threaten accuracy. Gaps in the logic of introductions need to be found and corrected early, and this too is a job for an editor.

Associate Professor Juliet Richters is a social epidemiologist whose research includes written, online and computer-assisted telephone interview surveys of community groups, clinical patients and large national population samples as well as in-depth qualitative analysis of textual and interview data. She has presented over 65 conference papers to local and international audiences, including invited keynote addresses. Before becoming an academic she was a professional editor and has taught science editing in the Macquarie University Graduate Diploma in Editing and Publishing. She currently teaches a course on Communication in Public Health as part of the Master in Public Health at the University of New South Wales.

William Laing has been a technical writer for more than 20 years, before which he taught English as a foreign language. He has several years experience conducting and reviewing state-wide computer-assisted telephone interview surveys in many health areas, and in the validation of results. After early studies in modern languages and statistics, he is currently doing postgraduate work in editing and publishing. He has worked as a voice actor for government and the software industry and for the print handicapped. He is the author of (among other works) a non-fiction book on TV quiz shows (published 2004).

Session 3: Benchmarks in plain English

Panelist 1: Susan McKerihan
Plain English in Australian business: where are we?

There is a growing appreciation for clear written communication, and many organisations have responded by employing professional writers to help them communicate with the public. But while this can work successfully in the case of documents produced for general consumption – annual reports, sales material, insurance policies – what happens when business consultants have to write complex and lengthy reports within a tight deadline, without professional help?

How do those documents stand up to the test of being clear and easy to understand? Not very well, judging by the examples in Don Watson's recent books.

A Plain English view of successful writing encompasses much more than word choice and sentence length. It considers the document as a whole – the organisation and presentation of the content as well as the language used – and how well and how easily its intended reader understands the ultimate message. This is where many business writers fail. Focusing on "writing", they seem to lose sight of the big picture.

There are several methods available, both commercially and informally, to help business writers organise their ideas and present their messages clearly. And yet we are still seeing examples of very poor writing throughout Australian business. What's going wrong?

Susan McKerihan is a Plain English editor with one of Australia's largest professional services firms. She works with consultants in all disciplines, industries and sectors, both within the firm and in the broader business and

government community, helping them write clear and succinct reports. She also tries to raise awareness of the principles of clear writing through workshops and newsletters. Susan has a Masters in Applied Linguistics and a Graduate Diploma in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, both from Sydney University.

Panelist 2: Howard Warner
Smart sentences: Turning readability theory into sustainable workplace practice

The traditional approach to plain English — as espoused by pioneer Sir Ernest Gowers and perpetuated by corporate style guides — focused on 'difficult' words in isolation. These days, many proponents are taking a more holistic approach, in which structure, presentation, functionality and expression are of equal weight. And scholars are measuring reader levels and developing readability formulas.

But how much of this applies to the overworked, under-trained, under-pressure corporate functionary, trying to communicate their employers' messages to stakeholders or the public? Knowing your readers is one thing; being able to engage them is quite another.

This paper aims to bridge the gap between readability/usability theory and coalface practice. It presents simple, accessible and sustainable ways for corporate writers to produce reader-friendly documents. It identifies the humble sentence as the biggest hurdle — for writers as well as readers. The paper distils the task of corporate writing into five basic sentence-level solutions:

1. Use more full-stops.
2. Reduce 'linkers'.
3. Use real subjects and strong verbs.
4. Prefer single, direct words to wordy phrases.
5. Simplify lists.

Howard Warner runs Plain English People, an Auckland-based agency offering plain-English document editing and writing-skills training. PEP deals with the range of 'public' documents generated by corporate, government and professional-services sectors. Among the various plain-English skills, Howard is most passionate about sentence-level editing. "Nothing appeals to my creative and problem-solving sides more than making over long, complex, waffly sentences — turning lumps of lead into crystal-clear gems," he says. He has been an editor of newspapers, magazines, education materials and corporate publications over the past 25 years. He has also taught writing and editing skills to tertiary students, business and professional migrants, and in-house professional teams.

Session 4: Style Council Public Forum on changing usage

Sponsored by the CAL Cultural Fund, to be recorded by the ABC for broadcast

The topic to be debated in this forum is: Which of the mass media has the greatest impact on the English language – as the clearinghouse of English usage?

The discussion will be led by three distinguished panelists: David Astle, Julian Burnside, Kate Burridge, each of whom will take up cudgels for one of the mass media, and present the case for it being the chief 'clearinghouse of languagec.

Julian Burnside
Why newspapers are the chief clearinghouse of usage

David Astle
TV Talk: Forging a New Futhorc

Kate Burridge
Social media: 'sup W d lingo — S dis lk d fucha?!!

The panelists' inputs will give place to comments and questions from the audience. At the end of the session, Chairman Alan Sunderland from ABC Radio National will put the key question to a general vote.

Julian Burnside QC was made an Officer of the Order of Australia in 2009, 'for service as a human rights advocate, particularly for refugees and asylum seekers, to the arts as a patron and fundraiser, and to the law'. These commitments are also expressed in his writing: a new edition of his *Watching Brief: Reflections on Human Rights, Law and Justice* was published in 2009; and in his roles as chair of the Melbourne arts venue fortyfivedownstairs. His keen observations on the English language are known to ABC listeners through *Lingua Franca*, and published in *Field Notes from an Amateur Philologist* (2nd edition 2009).

David Astle is the Dictionary Guy on SBS's *Letters and Numbers*, as well as DA behind *The Age*'s crossword, and a long-time word tragic. Readers of *Australian Style* will know him as compiler of the *Rubicon* puzzle, while for the last two years his weekly Wordplay column has been exploring veins of vernacular on the pages of *Spectrum*. A freelance journalist, a book reviewer with Radio National, David has also written two novels, a true-crime thriller, a trivia-travel guide to Australia. His most recent book is a plunge into language and the history of letter games: *Puzzled: Secrets & Clues from a Life Lost in Words*.

Kate Burridge is Professor of Linguistics in the School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics (Monash University) and a fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. Her main areas of research are: grammatical change in Germanic languages, the Pennsylvania German spoken by Amish/Mennonite communities in North America, the notion of linguistic taboo and the structure and history of English. She is a regular presenter of language segments on radio, and has appeared as a panelist on ABC TV's Can We Help? Her publications on language include *Blooming English* (2002), *Weeds in the Garden of Words* (2004), and with Keith Allen: *Forbidden Words: Taboo and the Censoring of Language* (2006).