

Quill

Fall 2002, Volume 8, Issue 3



Spotlight on the World Wide Web

Save the date: Saturday, October 5

Calendar of Events

Saturday, October 5, 2002

Untangling the World Wide Web
Cadmus Professional Communications
Linthicum, MD (details this page)

**October 31–
November 2, 2002**

AMWA Annual
Conference,
San Diego, CA



Saturday, June 7, 2003

Mid-Atlantic Chapter Conference
(details in the next issue of the *Quill*)

September 18-20, 2003

AMWA Annual Conference, Miami, FL

Annual Conference Program Online

It's not too late to register for the 2002 AMWA annual conference in San Diego. (See the Calendar of Events for the conference dates.) The conference program is available at <http://www.amwa.org/conference/2002/02online.html>. This Web site also has useful information about which workshops still have openings.

Join the AMWA Mid-Atlantic Chapter on Saturday, October 5, 2002, to learn about special techniques for writing Web copy and building a user-friendly Web site. Through panel discussion and small-group presentations, our speakers will help you understand what works—and what doesn't—when it comes to Web-based communications.

Whether you're already involved in Web writing and editing or would like to be, or if you've been thinking about launching a Web site of your own, this event is for you! We have lined up two speakers with a wealth of experience in Web design and communications.

- **Merry Bruns**, principal of ScienceSites Communications (www.sciencesitescom.com), is a specialist in science communications for the Web. She has produced Web sites and worked on Web writing and editing issues for more than seven years, working with clients to develop Web content and communicate it effectively. She also teaches workshops on Web writing, content development, and editing.

- **Joan Cranmer** launched Tempest Web Publications, LLC (www.tempestweb.com), in 1998. She targeted the roadblocks that frustrate individuals who seek Web-based information and developed ways to circumvent these problems. Today, she specializes in helping small companies improve their Web-based communications, customer support, and corporate image.

This event is being held at Cadmus Professional Communications in Linthicum, Maryland, near BWI Airport. (For those who attended the Mid-Atlantic Chapter Conference in June, this event is at the same location!) Thanks as always to Maryalice Ditzler and the Cadmus management for offering us the use of their conference rooms for this event.

Go to the chapter Web site, www.amwa-midatlantic.org, for a registration form and directions. Don't delay—the deadline for registration is September 30! Questions? Contact Tamia Karpeles, tamiak@comcast.net, 410-544-0216.



President's Message

Hi everyone—I am delighted to be serving as your AMWA Mid-Atlantic Chapter President for 2002-2003. Our board has many highly energetic people who make participating in the chapter such a pleasure.

This year we welcome President-Elect **Tamia Karpeles**, whom many of you already know from her pioneering work on our chapter Web site (and if you haven't checked it recently, please do: www.amwa-midatlantic.org). Tamia organized a fun family outing for the chapter this past June—a visit to the National Museum of Health and Medicine. She has already lined up wonderful events for our fall and winter chapter meetings. If you have a suggestion for a topic or a location for a future chapter meeting, please contact Tamia (410-544-0216, tamiak@comcast.net).

Maryalice Ditzler continues as our extremely capable treasurer. We welcome **Sharon Williams** as secretary and **Bruce B. Dan** and **Janice Deal** as new board members. We are grateful to continuing board members **Susan Farrer** and **Cindy W. Hamilton** and I give particular thanks for the

continued involvement and advice of Immediate Past President **Donna R. Savage** and past president and current *Quill* Editor **Eleanor Mayfield**. **Michael S. Altus** continues to serve the chapter by coordinating our e-mail list.

I hope many of you are planning to attend the 2002 AMWA annual conference in San Diego, California, from October 31 to November 2. Attending a national meeting is an opportunity to meet other medical writers from across the country and keep abreast of what is happening in our field. Note that the 2003 annual conference will take place in Miami, Florida, and will be held earlier in the year than usual (September 18–20, 2003).

I look forward to meeting many of you, and greeting those I have already met, at our chapter meetings over the course of this year. Please contact me with suggestions or questions about our chapter—I am really pleased to have the input (410-740-0086, sja25@cornell.edu).

— Susan J Atlas, PhD
Mid-Atlantic Chapter President

Mid-Atlantic Chapter Board of Directors 2002-03

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Two AMWA Workshops and Home in Time for Dinner

A report from the 2002 Mid-Atlantic Chapter conference

At a time when many full-time students were looking forward to the end of classes and the start of vacation, the Mid-Atlantic Chapter offered an educational beginning to the summer. On June 1, 2002, two AMWA core curriculum workshops were taught at the offices of Cadmus Professional Communications in Linthicum, Maryland (near BWI Airport). This accessible setting has proven to be a very convenient (and inexpensive) way to take AMWA workshops.

Statistics

Jessica Ancker, ELS, taught the morning workshop, "Statistics for Medical Writers and Editors." This is a required course for AMWA core curriculum certification. Although statistics is not usually thought of as an exciting subject, Ms. Ancker made it informative and interesting. The homework assigned before the class allowed attendees to refresh their statistical vocabulary and brush the cobwebs off their mathematical skills. Only simple math is needed for this course (no need to know calculus, thank goodness), but knowing the vocabulary is important. Attendees learned the difference between mean and median, what a P value is, and how to understand 95% confidence levels.

Interpreting data and determining what constitutes valid data is important for both reading research papers and writing about scientific data, Ms. Ancker said. She demonstrated her points through interactive examples and encouraged class discussion and questions. Terms such as "Student's *t* test," "interquartile range," "standard deviation," "skewed distribution," and many others were introduced and defined.

Do you know what a large P value means as opposed to a small P value? If not, then perhaps you should consider taking Ms. Ancker's statistics course. You will appreciate your increased understanding of scientific papers, which will be reflected in your writing later.

One of the advantages of taking AMWA workshops at Cadmus is the wonderful lunch provided. (It's included in the cost if you take both courses, or available at a small extra charge if you take just one course). The hour-and-a-half lunch break allowed plenty of time for eating, socializing, and taking a brisk walk around the business park.

Copyediting

Maryalice Ditzler, a highly experienced copyeditor at Cadmus, taught the afternoon workshop, "Essentials of Copyediting." This course is required for certification in the Editing/Writing concentration. Ms. Ditzler defined copyediting as "putting a manuscript under a microscope." She explained that there are three levels of copyediting: completeness and format, technical, and substantive. The differences among these levels were clarified, as were the changes that have occurred over the years in the copyediting field.

The qualities of a good copyeditor, Ms. Ditzler said, include being introverted, having an eye for detail, being patient and focused, and having a good knowledge of grammar but also having common sense. She discussed the terminology used in copyediting, including "page proof," "revised page proof," and "dirty copy."

The homework that attendees completed before the class was helpful in giving an idea of what a copyeditor's job entails. There are so many details to be aware of, but the copyeditor must also be careful not to change a manuscript too much. The most important objective is to be consistent throughout a manuscript for spelling, style, and usage.

Attendees were encouraged to discuss examples and problems that they had experienced in their own work and to get feedback from the group. Problems were presented to the class and worked out together. Although each publication has its own editing style that must be followed, there are also general rules that apply in most editing styles. Ms. Ditzler discussed different styles as well as copyediting marks and gave attendees helpful handouts to refer to later.

Copyediting is not for everyone, but if you are a stickler for details and like this type of work, this course is very informative and a good introduction to the field.

Taking two AMWA certification courses in one day and still being able to be home for dinner is an ideal way to meet your education needs, especially if you cannot afford to travel to the AMWA annual meeting every year. It is also a nice way to meet other medical writers and editors and do some valuable networking.

— Deborah Elias, MS

AMWA-MAC Web Site Development, Part 3: What's Next?

"A well-run Web site always indicates to me that an organization is alive and kicking." –AMWA MAC member Julie Longlet (response to chapter Web site survey)

If you haven't been to the chapter's Web site lately, take a look at it now (www.amwa-midatlantic.org). Where we once had a few links and tables set at random on a single page, we now have a navigation menu, an organized layout, and an understated, elegant style. Be sure to thank our pro bono Webmaster, John Wachter, for doing such a nice job setting up the site.

The site is finally taking shape as a communication hub for the chapter. Drop by anytime to find out about AMWA-MAC events, both in the greater DC area and in the Southeast Virginia satellite region. If you need to contact any of the chapter officers, board members, or other volunteers who keep things going behind the scenes, you'll find their phone numbers and e-mail addresses on the Web site. The *Quill* is available as well, with archives to January 2001.

Information is easy to find and the site is quick to load. No animated gifs, no theme music, no in-your-face graphics to confound your Internet connection. So bookmark it and plan to return frequently.

More to come

While we have the most essential information in place, many pages are still to be developed before we realize the full potential of the site. Major areas awaiting construction include the **Mid-Atlantic Chapter** section, where prospective members will find information about us; the **Members-only** area, where we'll post job listings and an opt-in membership directory; the **Freelance** section, where independent contractors can swap tips and list their services; and a **Links** page to put you in touch with numerous resources across the World Wide Web.

Members who responded to the Web site survey last spring offered many excellent suggestions for specific content that would benefit our membership and help our chapter grow. Here are just a few of those suggestions:

- A place where those of us who are "geographically challenged" (that is, distant from the current centers of chapter activity) can network to form dynamic satellite groups.
- A page where members can publish internship opportunities for students in the biomedical communications fields.
- Brief how-to pieces covering topics of interest to freelancers, such as negotiating fees, getting through lean periods, time management, and workspace organization.
- A section that lists the chapter's current needs for committee members, event coordinators, and other volunteers.

Each of these suggestions represents an opportunity for *you* to put your mark on the Web. My concept is to coordinate a network of page editors, each of whom adopts and develops a specific area within the site. If the idea of owning a piece of real estate in the Mid-Atlantic neighborhood of cyberspace appeals to you (and why wouldn't it?), you need look no further.

Get involved

To check out a more detailed listing of pages that are looking for an owner, go to the AMWA-MAC home page, click on the "Web site status" button, and then click on "What you can do."

Possible assignments range from simple (create content listings for back issues of *The Quill* so that users can tell at a glance what's inside) to challenging (become a conduit for information about forthcoming events hosted by other organizations of interest to our members).

It's time to step up to the plate. Begin by visiting the site to see what's there—and what the opportunities are. Visualize yourself in charge of your own piece of the network, bringing together information that will help others in the chapter get more out of their membership. You'll find that the return exceeds the investment. Let's get started.

– Tamia Karpeles, ELS

The next challenge in our ongoing quest for cyber-nirvana: Interactivity—the 800-pound gorilla. Coming in the Winter issue of the Quill. To get in touch with Tamia, e-mail tamiak@comcast.net.

Member Profile: Norman Grossblatt—Always Volunteering

If AMWA gave an award for the member who has worn the most hats in the organization, Norman Grossblatt would have to be among the candidates. To name just a few of the jobs he's done on a voluntary basis for AMWA: Manuscript editor for the *AMWA Journal*. Editor of the AMWA Freelance Directory. Chairman of multiple awards committees. He is about to complete a two-year term as AMWA's Administrator of Publications.

Norman has been an active member of the Mid-Atlantic Chapter since the late 1970s, when he worked on the chapter constitution and bylaws. That led to a stint as coordinator of chapter meetings. He served as chapter president in 1981-82. He has also been actively involved in the Council of Science Editors (CSE) and its predecessor organization, the Council of Biology Editors (CBE). But it may be as "founding father" of the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences (BELS) that Norman is best known.

Proficiency

BELS was founded in 1991 to evaluate the proficiency of editors in the life sciences and award credentials similar to those obtainable in other professions. To date, about 400 editors in the United States, Canada, and several European countries have obtained BELS certification.

It was in the early 1980s that a group of senior editors in the life sciences first expressed interest in establishing an examination that would set a standard of proficiency for the profession. As with any new undertaking, however, it took a dedicated driving force to make the idea a reality.

Norman's colleagues credit him with being that driving force and with having the leadership style that could make it happen. It was Norman who ended up chairing all the committees and working groups that decided such things as the length of the test, how the test would be proctored, and how the appeals process would work. (Every time one of these groups needed a chairperson, he says, "they always pointed at me.")

Leadership ability

Norman has an easy-going manner and the ability to put people at ease. But behind his easy personal manner is "the stubbornness of a mule," according to Bobbie Reitt, another member of the BELS founding group. Bobbie credits Norman with

having the leadership ability that was sorely needed in 1990 when years of work on a proposed certification test were nearly scuttled as the group lost the financial and moral support of CBE. A spur-of-the-moment poolside meeting in an Orlando hotel—organized by Norman—saved the day.

In an article published in the CSE newsletter *Science Editor* in 2001, Norman recalled the many worries that preceded the giving of the first BELS test. Among the concerns were that hundreds of hours of effort had been expended and when exam day finally dawned in Denver in May 1991, "maybe no one would show up."

Needless to say, this concern proved unfounded. But as one of the proctors of that first exam, Norman confessed: "None of us had ever even proctored an exam before. There were no instructions about how to handle unforeseen occurrences."

Before that first test was given, in appreciation of all the work Norman had done, his peers awarded him a 7-inch horned monkey gargoyle "wearing a very worried look. It sort of looked like me," he says with a chuckle.

Challenge

With the modesty that is part of his engaging style, Norman takes little credit for the success of BELS. "I didn't have a whip. I couldn't have held it together if they didn't want it to be held together," he says. He served as president of BELS from 1991 to 1999. It was a challenge to learn how to run the BELS organization, he says. The experience taught him respect for any executive who juggles hats and has to make many decisions.

In his working life, Norman is Senior Editor in the Division of Earth and Life Studies at the National Academies of Science, where he has been employed for over 30 years. He is tireless in urging other professionals in the medical writing and editing fields to step forward and do the much-needed volunteer work for their professional societies. He unequivocally states that all of the hats he has worn have been a relatively small burden and that he has gotten back as much as he gave.

— Patricia Gardner

* For more information about BELS go to www.bels.org.

Mid-Atlantic Members Lead the Way in San Diego

Seven members of the Mid-Atlantic Chapter will lead workshops and roundtable breakfasts at the 2002 AMWA annual conference in San Diego.

Workshops

Essentials of Copyediting – Maryalice Ditzler, Cadmus Professional Communications, Linthicum, MD

Natural Medicines: How to Write About a Growing Branch of Health Care – Cindy W. Hamilton, PharmD, Principal, Hamilton House, Virginia Beach, VA; and Gayle Nicholas Scott, PharmD, President, Medical Communication & Consulting, Virginia Beach, VA

Tables and Graphs – Howard M. Smith, Senior Director, INC Research, Charlottesville, VA

Writing and Designing Materials for Patient Education – Edie Stern, Director of Public Affairs, American Thyroid Association, Baltimore, MD

The Essentials of Preparing CME Materials for Medical Professionals – Eve Wilson, PhD, ELS, Medical Writer/Editor, Medicalliance Inc., Columbia, MD

Roundtable Breakfasts

Certification of Editors in the Life Sciences – Norman Grossblatt, ELS(D), National Academy of Sciences, Washington, DC

Writing Patient Education Materials – Edie Stern

Executive Committee

Two Mid-Atlantic members deserve special mention for being at the helm of AMWA throughout the year. Cindy Hamilton, PharmD, captained the Department of Chapters and will lead the chapter delegates session in San Diego. Norman Grossblatt, ELS(D), led the Department of Publications. We wish Norman luck as he completes his 2-year term on the Executive Committee after the San Diego conference. Cindy will remain on the Executive Committee and will coordinate next year's annual conference in Miami, scheduled for September 18-20, 2003.

Chapter Social

If you're going to be at the annual conference in San Diego, be sure to join other chapter members at the chapter social on Thursday night, October 31.

– Beth McGlooin, RN, MSN, NP

Eleanor Mayfield
10227 Green Holly Terrace
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