

Calendar

The Other Chicago

Get the Dish on Style

It's a big book — 956 pages, with a two-inch-wide spine. Its jacket is bright orange. And, like its 14 predecessors, it contains the answers to questions you never thought anyone needed to know.

It's the 15th edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style*, which bills itself as "The Essential Guide for Writers, Editors, and Publishers." It's been ten years since the last edition was issued by the University of Chicago Press. The first one, published in 1906, was based on dog-eared pages shared around the press's office. Much of the new material has

been generated by the electronic revolution and the impact it has had on

everyone who works with printed words.

"Style" here doesn't mean "writing" style. *Chicago*, as it's called for short, doesn't concern itself with whether an author's prose is florid or flowery. Its expertise is in "editing" style — i.e., consistency with capitals, hyphens, and the like. *Chicago* wastes no time with ironclad spellings. "Aficionado" is always spelled "aficionado," and the plural of "graffiti" is always "graffiti," as a dictionary will tell you. *Chicago* rules on things that could be written one way as easily as another — e.g., "one third," "one-third," "1/3," "1/3rd," or "1/3d." (*Chicago's* preference? So-called simple fractions are spelled out and hyphenated: "She has read one-third of the book." Fractions used in scientific contexts and in mathematical copy have their own guidelines.)

"Editing nuts" is what Jackie Estrada calls people who care about this stuff. Actually, like herself, they are paid to. A professional editor for 33 years, Estrada will lead a discussion about the new tome and its changes, some of them controversial, at the next meeting of the San Diego Professional Editors Network.

Speaking from her home office on Labor Day, where she was editing a book on oil drilling, Estrada said she was sorry that "Table 6.1" of chapter six in the previous edition had been scrapped. "Table 6.1 was about hyphenation. It was the Bible for us all. It had 'all-inclusive,' 'all-around,' 'all-powerful,' and 'all right.' And it had general remarks about when you use a hyphen with 'all' and when you don't. It did the same with other words, like 'cross,' 'full,' 'half,' 'under,' 'quasi,' and 'self.' It was always the most thumbed chapter. Now, instead of a table, there's a list, run-in

[as the above lists are], so things are harder to find. It's called 'Compounds Formed with Specific Terms,' and it's in chapter seven."

Estrada said she disagrees with how *Chicago* decided to write the word meaning "sites on the Web." It chose "Web site," rather than, say, "web site," or, Estrada's preference, "website." She predicted that in the next edition it will be expressed her way. "The trend in American style and usage is toward compounds and lower case. It makes it more readable. Anytime there's a capital it jumps out."

In their introduction *Chicago's* editors warn, "The proofreader should watch for the kind of errors missed by computer spell checkers." Estrada said she was annoyed that her job has been made more difficult by the widely used spell-check program of Microsoft Word. "Word has a lot of stuff built into it that's wrong. For instance, unless you change the automatic settings, the program puts hyphens into words that shouldn't have them. Or it will say 'okay' to things that aren't. The people

who write programs are technicians; they're not experts on grammar, and they drive me nuts."

Chicago's editors acknowledge that "electronic publishing requires a special kind of editing and proofreading." But finding the answers to questions that have cropped up since the Internet was born is a chore, Estrada said, "because [the new edition] has the world's worst index." She is, however, grateful for the "straightforward" ruling on citing Internet sources in footnotes and bibliographies. "I've been editing a lot of books that contain those citations. And until now the authors were having to make it up as they went along. Some used regular brackets around the date of access; others used curly brackets. Or they put the date before the URL or after it. Now we have a format and an order in which to put things."

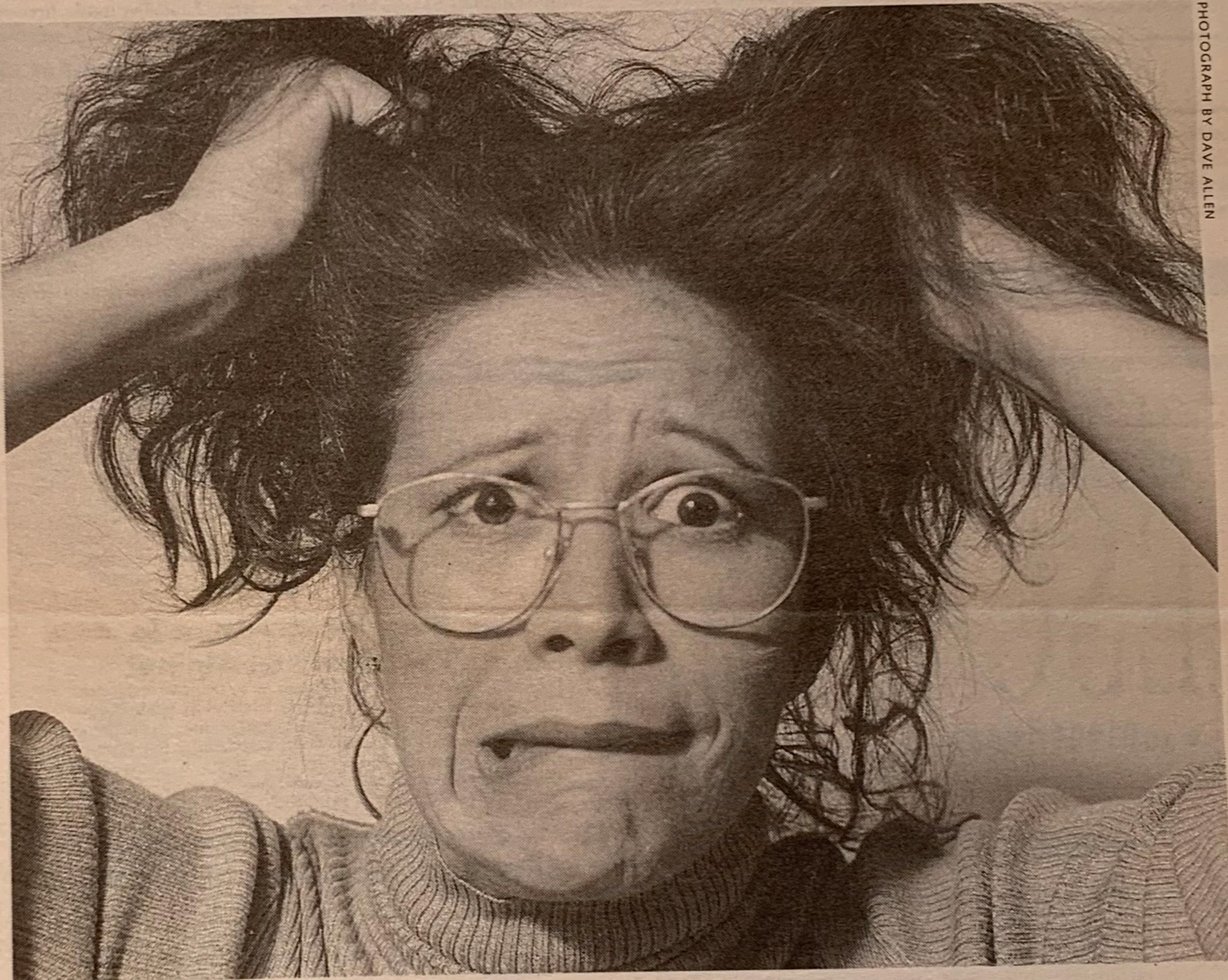
How to handle line breaks when writing URLs is addressed by *Chicago* in three places. Adding a hyphen would introduce error. There's trouble, too, with adding periods, which could be mistaken for dots. In each instance,

Chicago tells what to do.

It also supplies answers to questions even Estrada doesn't want to know. "There are now three different ways to write ellipses, using three periods and four. And to me, the third option, which is for the ultra stickler...forget it. I guess if you're doing really hard-core legal stuff, it's necessary. But the ultimate thing is, if you're an editor, ask yourself: Are you making it easier for the reader to read? And: Have you avoided distorting the original material?"

— Jeanne Schinto

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6:30 p.m.
Clairemont Community Room
4731 Clairemont Drive,
Clairemont
Free
Info 858-451-3266 or
www.sdpn.com**



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