

# Tracking Changes

*The Journal of the Society for Editing*

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**We're all  
in this  
together**

## ACES' new president shares her thoughts on moving our organization forward

by Sara Ziegler

When Teresa Schmedding and David Sullivan announced their decisions not to run again as president and vice president of ACES: The Society for Editing, I panicked.

This organization owes so much of its success and stability to their leadership. Could we keep up the initiatives they had set in motion? Where would the next big ideas come from? And who would possibly fill their shoes?

After that moment of panic, I looked around at the people who make up ACES: the volunteers who work so tirelessly, the members who keep coming back to our conferences, the editing veterans who jump to contribute to Twitter chats and panel

sessions. I remembered that there's no one person responsible—we're all in this together to promote the work of editors and to lift each other up.

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**We need to balance the needs of members who have been here since the beginning with the needs of a new generation of editors—those who may have approached the field in completely different ways.**

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Even in my short time on the board, ACES has grown by leaps and bounds. In 2015, when I became treasurer, we had 1,300 members; today, we're at more than 2,500. It's so exciting—but it brings new challenges.

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**Understand your audience, stitch together sideways narratives, cut out extraneous material. These guidelines will help you be a better quilter—and editor.**

by Amy Spungen

How is quilting like editing, you wonder? You *don't* wonder? In fact, you are rolling your eyes at the notion of a grannyish quilter just a rockin' in her chair, cat snoozing at her slippers feet, compared to the image of a professional, high-tech-savvy editor, masterfully executing Important Projects?

Well, since I both quilt and edit, I can say with authority that there are more similarities between the two than you might imagine. For instance, I have been known to edit in my slippers, cat draped upon my keyboard. Just kidding! Well, maybe.

Can you tell I'm a bit sensitive about stereotypes? Some of us quilters *are* grandparents, of course, but there are plenty of younger folk, and many of us are professionals. We are doctors, teachers, cowpeople, librarians, and engineers. And one of the best quilters in my northern Illinois guild is male. Just like editors, we quilting women and men come with a wide variety of ages, interests, experience, and backgrounds.

## The Beginning, or Top

What are some of the first things to consider before starting an editing project? That's right: the message. The audience. The intricacy of the content. The quality of the material. The length. The guidelines. The deadline. Those apply to quilting, too.



*This Prairie Star quilt took me more than a year to complete.*

I'm a professional editor, not a professional quilter. But professional or not, as with editing, when I discuss a quilting project with the intended recipient, my first step is to establish the goal. And that leads to the audience.



Is my audience a jury of adults deciding whether my project is prizeworthy or a child who loves dinosaurs? Perhaps someone whose husband died wants a comforting memento made of his favorite shirts. I listen carefully, as I do with editing clients. This is the stage where it may not seem like I'm doing much, but my brain is on overdrive as I consider the possibilities.

By the end of my pondering stage, I have a plan—a pattern to follow, the material I need, guidelines to help me stay organized, and a time frame. I divide my work time into reasonable increments. The beauty of being a quilter, as with being a freelance editor, is having the flexibility to shift working blocks of time around as convenience dictates or unforeseen situations arise.

I may not feel fortunate about this when I find myself editing or quilting in the wee hours of the morning (this would definitely be in slippers), but I've learned how to minimize the likelihood of late-night work happening over the years, mainly by practicing the word “no.” Sometimes I won't take on that tempting project because it will throw my work-life balance, already tenuous, completely out of whack. I'm fine with a relatively quick turnaround, but it has to be within the parameters of what I consider reasonable.

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*Curved piecing introduced many circles of hell as I toiled over this Indian Orange Peel quilt.*

Why? Because a reasonable deadline allows for high-quality execution, and a deadline that comes up too fast may result in an unavoidably sloppy, unsightly product.

## The Middle, or Batting

Quilts consist of a pieced-fabric top; a middle, insulating layer; and a fabric bottom. Think of a quilt top, in which a design comes to life, as a narrative meticulously pieced together. Interpreting the design of a quilt is similar in some ways to approaching a text, especially fiction; it can be formal and austere, though lovely (think Henry James or Amish quilts); it can be bold and exuberant, with jewel tones and a curving, dramatic design; it can evoke childhood or a specific place—or be as dull as paste and poorly done.

Once assembled to the satisfaction of its creator, it's time to edit the story, tightening it up, cutting or removing extraneous material, and stitching the top to its supporting layers for optimal beauty and strength. With care, the skilled quilter positions the top, middle, and bottom into a “sandwich” under the needle. Then she—or he, or whoever—takes a breath, presses the pedal, and begins editing the components into a final form, using as heavy or as light a hand as needed, whether adding intensive free-motion stippling or barely there stitch-in-the-ditch lines.

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Both quilting and editing are repetitive physical acts often performed in long stretches while sitting. This arduous work poses health challenges mitigated by frequent adjustments in posture, as well as breaks for water, coffee, and, on occasion, wine.

Speaking from experience, I suggest that, if you ever come upon a stunned quilter or editor sucked into the black hole of a looming deadline, shoulders hunched, mechanically toiling despite obvious exhaustion, gently get their attention. Look them in their bleary eyes with sympathy, place a comforting hand on their shoulder, and then say quietly but firmly, “Step away from your machine now. *Now.*” Be prepared to wrap them snugly in a blanket to restrict flailing limbs and remove them to a quiet, contained room if necessary. (Actually, those may be the instructions my vet gave before Kitty was vaccinated. But you get my point.)



*I made these Bargello quilts out of my husband's ties. Next time I will ask for permission to use them.*



*I loved the simple, straight lines of this Magic Squares quilt.*

## The End, or Backing

After days, weeks, and often months of intense focus, the colors and pattern of the quilt, like the words I have edited, have merged into a cohesive language communicating the desired message to the viewer. Finally, the quilting is done. The edited text has gone through design. Now both quilt and novel are ready for binding.

The book is sandwiched between covers and bound with glue, stitching, or staples. The quilt's raw edges are covered. Though I am not involved in that final publishing step, I am the one who attaches the fabric binding by hand, sealing the quilt together seamlessly and rendering it complete.

Both editing and quilting cast a spell upon me every time I embark on a project. If the many bits and pieces of each can seem at times tedious and uninspiring—if they sometimes make me want to shriek and on occasion prompt completely justified curses—the successfully completed project nonetheless can seem magical. It's finished! And it's ... beautiful. All is harmonious with the project, with my client, and with my world.

I'm talking about quilting, and I'm talking about editing. ●

*Amy Spungen, who lives in Highland Park, Illinois, has been editing for nearly 30 years and quilting for almost as long. She hopes this essay inspires you to visit your closest quilt shop; feel free to contact her if you have any quilting questions. You can also read more about [Amy's quilting journey](#).*