

Fifteen shades at play: the new ‘supermodel’ to guide text editors by

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‘The common impression is that [editing] consists of correcting grammar and punctuation, which it does, but the job has many other aspects that make it endlessly absorbing.’ (Mackenzie 2011: 1)

The wraps are off and all can now be revealed. The innovative CCC model for the analysis, evaluation and improvement of texts – available to English-language text editors since mid-2012 – has been bedded down and is already being embraced by practitioners worldwide. With its 15 nuanced evaluation points, levels and criteria, this versatile rubric offers a thoroughly systematic approach to error detection and text improvement that makes it ideally suited to supporting both emergent and experienced text editors. Indeed a benign, voluptuous vademecum for massaging ‘endlessly absorbing’ texts towards perfection.

The groundbreaking CCC model – and boon to text editors – is the brainchild of linguist Prof Dr Jan Renkema, Professor Emeritus in Linguistics at the University of Tilburg in the Netherlands. His first article on the Dutch version dates back to 1994; a series of articles and papers about it ensued through to 2012. In that year, the model was first made available to English-language writers and text editors worldwide through the publication of *Text editing* (Van de Poel, Carstens & Linnegar 2012). That set the stage for its being used as an innovative teaching and training tool too.

After consulting widely about the effectiveness of his original 33-point, six-level model, Renkema honed it down to the current 15 points and five levels (Renkema 2002: 177, 183–184). Through applying the refined model in a variety of contexts he has been able to demonstrate its effectiveness in analysing text quality, as have other adopters or modifiers of the model (Daniëls 2011; Van de Poel & Carstens 2010; Van de Poel, Carstens & Linnegar 2012). They in turn have devised alternative shadings that have rendered it into a powerful text-editing tool.

Text editing is essentially about improving writing to the extent that it conveys authors’ intended meaning and communicates with readers as flawlessly as possible. Text analysis is a first step. Like others in this field, Schellens and Steehouder (2008: 3) state that ‘text analysis helps us to form well-considered judgements about the quality of a text ... it equips us to discuss texts on the basis of sound arguments’. But what is ‘quality’? And how do different errors affect text quality?

‘Now, “quality” is a particularly vague notion’ (my translation). These were among the first words of an article Renkema published in 1999 (1999a: 1), and they expressed the dilemma he and other linguists were grappling with at that time: Precisely how does one evaluate text quality in a manner that is meaningful, systematic and helpful to a writer? And to what extent does such an analysis reflect the reality? (Renkema & Schellens 1996) An early article (Renkema 1994b) focused primarily on how the model could be used to diagnose the different imperfections in a text by systematic analysis (1999a: 3, 4). That falls four-square in the domain of the text editor, which is what makes it so appropriate to our craft.

Renkema was concerned at the lack of systematicity at that time in the evaluation of texts that were viewed as ‘shady’ means of communication: he found too many ‘diagnoses’ of problems vague, ad hoc, subjective: ‘too unstructured’, ‘this paragraph doesn’t work’, ‘word choice inappropriate’, etc (1998a: 40). However, he noted, ‘[i]n the past few years, we have seen increasing attention being given to a more systematic analysis’ (1998a: 40) (my translation).

Other text analyses at the time were focusing too heavily on weaknesses at a word and sentence level (Renkema (1992; 1994a) considered these “external” aspects’) at the expense of the paragraph level or the level of the text as a whole. Those analyses led to a lack of information about and scant consideration of the reader’s needs (Schraver 1989: 244). For Renkema, there was too little consensus in the literature on the subject about the number of levels of text analysis there should ideally be (Renkema 2002: 179).

Amid all the discussions about how best to evaluate text quality, he recalled in a 1998 article that:

‘I placed my intuition, ideas and insights in one model, the CCC model. I worked with this model in applied research and in courses on text evaluation. My experience ... is that the model ... can render discussions about the quality of a text clearer ... [It] is intended as a framework’ (Renkema 1998b: 29; also 2000: 29, 34) (my translation).

Renkema regarded this approach to applying the criteria and evaluation points (the shades or nuances) of the CCC model as the way forward:

‘On the basis of an analysis of a text using the CCC model ... one can often formulate suggestions ... that deal with the purpose of the writer and the expectation of the reader’ (Renkema 1999b: 5) (my translation).

Ultimately, the success of a text as a communicative piece hinges on whether there is reciprocity, a good balance, between the author’s intentions or objectives being clearly conveyed and the reader’s needs or expectations being met (Nystrand 1986: 36; Renkema, Sanders, Sanders & Van Wijk 1994; Renkema 1998a: 42, 1999a: 1; Renkema & Kloet 2000: 36). Similarly, Schellens and Steehouder (2008: 2) focused on the way in which content and structure correspond to the author’s objectives and the target group. In this regard, the text editor can be viewed as a benign voyeuristic interloper, a stand-in for the unseen reader, able to help the author better meet readers’ needs or expectations.

Renkema’s CCC model

‘On the basis of comments made by experts and lay people in discussions on text quality’ (Renkema 1998a: 43, 2001: 40), Renkema devised his rubric of 15 point which the editor could bring into play. He settled upon the label ‘model for evaluation’ (as opposed to ‘checklist’ or ‘schema’, or ‘analysis’ or ‘judgement’) because, he argued (2002: 177–178), a model is a more theoretical, ordered framework better suited to research (2002: 178), an attribute the other labels lacked.

He was therefore at great pains to ensure that his refined model was manageable, and to this end applied three conditions to it: insightfulness/simplicity; comprehensiveness, and clarity in the naming and purpose of the categories (2002: 184–188) (in the last of these he has not been entirely successful, in my view). The CCC model also had to be independent of text type: the evaluation points had to be suited to massaging any type of text into perfection (Renkema & Cleutjens 1997: 107; Renkema 2002: 182).

And so ‘15 shades’ was made flesh. It’s a logically nuanced model that still requires some instruction and practice to maximise its use; but it nevertheless provides helpful guiding criteria for the text editor to follow instead of their going by ‘gut feel’ and not doing a text the justice due to it. Its 15 evaluation points are presented within a coherent, hierarchical rubric (Renkema 1998a: 43, 2001: 40), illustrated in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Renkema's refined CCC model

Text level	Criteria for analysis of text quality		
	Correspondence	Consistency	Correctness
A. Text type	1 Appropriateness	2 Purity of genre	3 Application of genre rules
B. Content	4 Sufficient information	5 Agreement between facts	6 Correctness of facts
C. Structure	7 Sufficient coherence	8 Consistent structure	9 Correct linking words
D. Wording	10 Appropriate wording	11 Unity of style	12 Correct syntax and choice of words
E. Presentation	13 Appropriate layout	14 Layout adapted to text	15 Correct layout, spelling and punctuation
Evaluation points			

Source: Renkema (2001)

The relative weight of each nuanced point is best expressed when one reads the rubric from top to bottom and from left to right. The first level's evaluation points (EP1,2,3) should carry the most weight, as do those in the first column (EP1,4,7,10,13): an error at EP4 carries more weight, for example, than another at EP12 (Renkema 1999a: 3). This weighting encourages the text editor to approach a text systematically, top-down, and to consider macro issues before working on the micro errors and weaknesses.

So, for Renkema, the evaluation points of his rubric together form a coherent hierarchy: the higher up the levels, the more critical to effective communication they are, the more critical the errors to be remedied are (Renkema & Cleutjens 1997: 107–108, 1999a: 3). In this way, in text analysis and improvement the model can be regarded as a kind of sieve: when flaws prevent the writer or editor passing through level A (text type) or B (content), attending to wording and punctuation would be a pointless exercise (1998b, 2001: 44; cf Mackenzie 2011). Looked at through another lens, the model makes it possible to identify systematically the factors influencing the effectiveness of a particular text type (Renkema 2001: 44).

The first column represents the criterion of *correspondence*, defined as the alignment of the author's intention and the needs of the reader (Renkema 1999a: 2). In essence, to what extent do the content, structure, etc meet the requirements of both the medium and the target group? This group possesses certain characteristics based on, for example, educational level and the extent of their need for certain information (Renkema 2002: 178). This gives the writer some freedom to choose the type of text and whether they stay true to the characteristics of the type throughout (1999a: 1, 2002: 178). Renkema regards correspondence as comprising the most important shades at play (or criteria), the quality of a text being fundamentally affected by the extent of the alignment between writer and reader. To be optimal, it should be achieved at all the levels represented in this column: text type, content, structure, wording and presentation.

To resolve errors of correspondence, ideally both the writer and the reader should be involved, says Renkema (1999a: 2). But in practice it will probably be the writer and the text editor (wearing the reader's shoes) who will improve the text to something more reader-centred. Text editors must therefore embrace collaboration in their textual interventions.

The second column of shades concerns the oft-neglected criterion of *consistency* (EP2,5,8,11,13). A text meets these requirements when the choices a writer makes (eg a certain structure, word choice, style of punctuation) are maintained consistently throughout (Renkema 1999a: 2). For example, it's not good

for an author to divide their text on the basis of both thematic and chronological schemas: that structural dissonance will only confuse or alienate the reader (Renkema 2002: 178). To resolve consistency problems, the vigilant text editor will always compare the shades at play in at least two parts of a text, because it's between them that any discrepancy may have occurred (Renkema 1999a: 2).

The third column has to do with *correctness* or correct usage (EP3,6,9,12,15): genre rules, factual accuracy, linkages, syntax and word choice, spelling and punctuation (Renkema 1999a: 2). Normative linguistics and factual accuracy play a central role here, making the evaluation of text quality easier – errors being the least 'shaded', often easier to detect. Frequently the novice text editor's starting point, the CCC model tries to persuade them to consider aspects of correctness last. Here, text editors must refer to external resources (Renkema 1999a: 2), which can include dictionaries, grammars and writing guides. Past experience, education and general knowledge can also contribute significantly to an accomplished editorial intervention when correctness is in question.

These three criteria work together to spin 15 shades of error out of the five text *levels*: text type (EP1,2,3), content (EP4,5,6), structure (EP7,8,9), wording (EP10,11,12) and presentation (EP13,14,15). Editorial intervention should commence at Level A.

Level A. Text type

EP1 requires the writer, the text editor to respond to the question, 'Is this text, as a whole, appropriate to its readers and the medium?' If fundamentally it does not meet the needs or expectations of its intended readers, then it will fail on this criterion alone (Renkema 2002: 180). Similarly, if it is not suited to the identified medium. For example, an academic text must have an appropriate degree of formality, appropriate structure and word usage; text intended for a website should comprise the short sentences and paragraphs, bulleted items and subheads of journalistic style.

EP2 evaluates a text in terms of its genre: Does it adhere consistently to the prescripts of fiction writing as opposed to an academic textbook, for instance?

EP3: Does the text adhere to the rules of composition that pertain to its genre? If not, it is not of an acceptable quality. All the text editor can do here is refer the problem to the author for revision.

Level B. Content

EP4 requires us to evaluate whether the content of a text is sufficient or adequate: Has the writer covered the topic fully enough, or is it too skimpily clad? And is the information provided in itself adequate? Again, the text editor should point out inadequacies – diplomatically – to the author.

EP5 has to do with whether the content is consistent, it concurs and is not contradictory: for example, spellings of names may vary; dates may be at odds in different places of the text.

EP6: The correctness of the information provided is critically important: dates, names and other facts should be correct, otherwise the text will suffer criticism for being 'too grey'. The eagle-eyed text editor will detect and either correct or query them.

Level C. Structure

EP7 deals with the appropriateness of the structure of a text. If a written piece is poorly structured, with sections or paragraphs in the wrong sequence or incorrectly constructed, then the reader will find it a trial to follow. The text editor who tinkers too intently with errors of grammar, spelling and punctuation could overlook structural errors, leaving the text fundamentally flawed. Their intervention will not pass muster.

EP8: A writer should maintain a certain structure consistently throughout a document, otherwise the text as a whole will not make complete sense to a reader. For instance, if every chapter is supposed to open with Introduction and end with Summary, omitting either of these features or labelling them differently will confuse the reader. Similar confusion could reign if the reader were confronted with a mixture of thematic and chronological structuring. The text editor's role here is to identify this problem and convince the writer to make good the structure, not rewrite or restructure the text him- or herself.

EP9 helps writers and editors to consider the effectiveness of the linkages used to help the readers follow the narrative or argumentation.

Level D. Wording

EP10 forces the text editor to examine the writer's use of wording: Is it appropriate to the readers, the medium and the intention in writing the piece? Using wording that is unfamiliar to readers without explaining its particular usage in context will not help the readers to fulfil their needs or expectations in reading the text. With a text editor at play, such words can either be contextualised or explained, or even glossed.

EP11 considers the consistent use of words in their many shades – meaning, spelling, capitalisation, hyphenation or otherwise. When the writer fails to use words precisely and consistently to convey the same meaning, or fails to apply house style consistently, the text editor should step in.

EP12: Are the author's syntax and word choice correct? This EP covers questions of correct grammar and sentence construction, where black-and-white is more likely to hold sway over grey, grammar-smart editors over grammar-suspect writers.

Level E. Presentation

EP13 requires the writer or text editor to assess the quality of a text according to its presentation in print or digitally. Do the layout, font style and size, line spacing, arrangement of the text on the page help the reader make better sense of the writer's message?

EP14 seeks an evaluation of the consistency of the layout and whether it is in harmony with the text. The design elements must not only convey visual messages of consistency but also support the messages being conveyed by the text.

EP15 is about the correctness of the typography, spelling and punctuation, regarded as highly visible elements of texts. Such errors can send out negative impressions of a text as having been carelessly put together. They can even cast a shadow over the content and the author.

If a text satisfies all 15 evaluation points, then it is of optimal quality (Renkema 2000: 25, 2012: 9). But to get it to that state usually requires eyes and hands other than the author's: those of the text editor. The strength of the CCC model lies in its penchant for guiding the practitioner 'at play' on a text systematically towards the prize of Top Quality. No room here for haphazard play.

On the contrary, the CCC model encourages an approach to text analysis that is well suited not only to practising text editors but also to teaching and training editors, to set them off on the right footing or steer them in the right direction (Van de Poel, Carstens & Linnegar 2012). These innovative uses are precisely what makes the rubric of 15 shades – the CCC model – such an indispensable boon for text editors: for the first time, it offers a thorough, structured approach to analysing texts of any kind, detecting and labelling the errors in them, and massaging them systematically towards perfection.

I've used this innovative 'supermodel', put it to the test on many texts and applied it in mentoring and training text editors. I've witnessed it transform the professional lives of editors who've embraced it, wanting more than the mere titivation of texts. And I can vouch that Renkema's rubric has been responsible for many an ecstatic revelation and more than a few seductions by its sensible charms, and has catalysed masterful subservience to the shades of a newfound textual playmate.

[2968 words]

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