



Sightings



The Longview Group, LLC

INSIGHTS...IN SIGHT

June 2009 Vol. 7, No. 6



SIGHTINGS is going ALL DIGITAL and more eco-friendly.

Beginning in September, SIGHTINGS will be available only via electronic distribution.

Subscribers who receive the paper version of SIGHTINGS will be sent a form to complete and return indicating their preferred email address.

NO SIGHTINGS IN JULY.

Look for the next issue in August.

The Longview Group, LLC
3 Longview Knoll
Iowa City, IA 52240

Tel: 319.351.6510
Free: 866.351.6510
Fax: 319.351.6520
info@longview-group.com

www.longview-group.com



INSIGHTS...IN SIGHT



Writer's Tools of the Trade

This piece was written by Mary Jo Finchum, Public Relations Administrator for The Stanley Group, Muscatine Iowa. It is reprinted with her permission.

Tools of the trade are essential to most professions. Hair stylists employ an arsenal of scissors, combs, curling irons and gels to create attractive and fashionable dos. Engineers rely on codes, standards and calculations to design functional facilities that meet quality and safety requirements. Likewise, most communicators use a plethora of reference books and websites that provide definitions, style rules and guidelines on grammar and punctuation.

There are literally thousands of reference books and websites to use but most communicators have a collection of favorites that they consistently rely upon. Ask five writers to list their favorites and you'll get five different

answers. But you will likely see similarities in the types of materials they use. Browse through their bookcases and you'll likely find at least one or two dictionaries, a style book, thesaurus and several books on grammar and punctuation.

I began building my collection in college. The foundation was initially the *Associated Press Stylebook*. It was the textbook in my first journalism class and is still widely used by print journalists. It is organized alphabetically and contains Associated Press style rules on a variety of questions such as what words to capitalize, and when to spell out numbers instead of using figures. (AP says spell out whole numbers

below 10, use figures for 10 and above.) It also contains quick background information on a wide range of topics, and has sports and business sections, and a briefing on American media law.

The stylebook was my primary go-to book until I began working for Stanley Consultants. Engineering firms frequently produce reports and technical papers and the AP Style Manual isn't thorough enough to cover everything. So I had to begin using the *Gregg Reference Manual* which is the company standard. Initially I was a reluctant convert. Rather than being alphabetical, the manual is organized by content. Users must look up topics in a detailed index that directs them to the appropriate numbered example and explanation. Part 1 covers the basic rules of grammar, usage and style. Part 2 deals with the techniques and procedures for creating and formatting all kinds of written communications. You'd be hard pressed to find a common writing topic that isn't covered. Ultimately I've come to rely heavily on the *Greggs Reference Manual*. My 8th edition by William A. Sabin is dog eared, filled notes and covered in yellow stickies.

My dictionaries of choice are *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* and *Webster's Third New International* unabridged. The *New Collegiate* was also a college purchase (i.e. now quite old) but it still serves its purpose. I only pull out the *Webster's Third New*



International Dictionary when I have a serious need because the oversized book weighs about 20 pounds.

Until recently my reference books were actual physical books I held in my hands. But over the past few years I've started to use software tools and websites. It's easier and faster to use Microsoft Word's built-in spell check and thesaurus applications than to pull out a dictionary or thesaurus. Occasionally I need a more thorough reference but usually the software applications suffice. The program that automatically spell checks all my outgoing e-mail is immeasurably faster than checking each questionable word in an actual dictionary.

One of my favorite online reference sites is called RhymeZone (www.rhymezone.com). It is a web-based tool that helps writers to find rhymes, synonyms, anonyms, definitions, similar sounding words, match consonants, related words, and similar spellings. Just type in the word, ask it what you want and click. Moments later the results pop up. I use it predominantly when I'm trying to write a clever headline.

Wikipedia is another favorite reference site. It is an online encyclopedia written collaboratively by volunteers across the world. It is a very popular general reference site on the internet. Critics are skeptical of its accuracy and its policy of favoring consensus over credentials in its editorial process. I tend to agree since my 16-year-old son has successfully contributed definitions and information on Wikipedia but it's still a quick and easy way to find information. Just be sure to double check the information with a more legitimate source.

Before long all my physical reference materials may be replaced with the online versions. While writing this column I discovered the *Gregg Reference Manual* is available on line. If I sign up for it I may never again have to leave my chair to pull out a reference manual.

WHAT IS THE LONGVIEW GROUP, LLC?

Seeking more efficiency and effectiveness in your professional service business? The Longview Group, LLC provides you INSIGHTS through training, on-the-job coaching, expert counsel, and extra-hands services.



A publication of

The
Longview
Group, LLC