

# CyberTreasures and Mirrors

## Fight the Fog

Karen Shashok wrote from Granada, Spain, about the European Commission Translation Service's campaign to encourage EC translators to use plain English (1). The effort, called Fight the Fog, includes a Web site with its own "Fog Song" sung to the tune of "Yesterday" and a booklet with hints on how to write English without fog and a collection of fog humor. The introduction explains, "This light-hearted campaign draws

attention to the dangers of FOG—that vague grey pall that descends on EU documents, obscuring meanings and messages, causing delays and irritation."

Well, I can only say that the EC does not have a corner on the market when it comes to fog, and we can all enjoy its attempts to minimize its existence. It also has a Web site that includes a style guide (2). Kudos to Emma Wagner and Francis Flaherty.

PS: The Howler of the Day when I last

visited was this: "The flattening of underwear with pleasure is the job of the chambermaid." My favorite: a doctors' office sign, "Specialists in women and other diseases."

## Editors' Forums

Sometimes a little shop talk is good for the soul: What do other people consider copy-editing responsibilities to be? Is information design an editorial function? What is the editor's role in a Web site? How do readers

respond to sweeping changes in logos, banners, mastheads?

Grace Darling advised me of a site just for those moments: Bay Area Editors' Forum (3). It's fun. It's informative. And it addresses that occasional nagging thought, "Does anyone else care about this issue?"

### **Mirror Sites — Reliable?**

The world is a big place, and it does take time (sometimes a seemingly long time) for Web content to travel from its server to a user halfway around the world. That is what is happening when the computer seems to be doing nothing after you have entered a URL.

Mirror sites provide a local server for a site created thousands of miles away. In intent, the mirror site is like a booster station that makes the content, exactly as it appears on the original Web site, available at a more local site.

To many people, having someone request to mirror a site is an honor. It implies that your site is considered worthwhile by your peers. Or at least that is the up side.

The down side, we recently learned at

BrighamRad, is that mirror sites do not always stay current and are able to alter the original site (even though neither is considered good etiquette).

So, what can the Webmaster do? Because we didn't want to eliminate our mirror sites, we decided to add a few lines at the end of our own screens. They explain what our official mirror sites are and also note our home URL. Users are thus reminded that if the information is somehow questionable (out of date, for example), they can compare the URL on the site with our home URL and know whether they are on a mirror site. Furthermore, our URL in the footnote is a link to the original site.

In general, a user can check whether a site is a mirror site by scrutinizing the URL. It does not always work, but it is a good test for institutional and commercial sites. In both instances, the URL usually indicates in some way the source of the site. For example, our home page says "Harvard Medical School", and our URL contains the word "harvard". If it were a mirror site, the URL would have the name of the entity mirroring the site.

Reliable? Yes, most mirror sites reflect the original site just as the term "mirror" implies. So if you have a reason to doubt, check the URL.

Let's chat: [sedwards@ulna.bwh.harvard.edu](mailto:sedwards@ulna.bwh.harvard.edu)

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### **References**

1. The European Commission Translation Service. Fight the Fog—Write Clearly. (7 Jan 1998) <http://europa.eu.int/comm/sdt/en/ftfog/index.htm> (23 August 1998).
2. The European Commission Translation Service. English Style Guide. (7 June 1998) <http://europa.eu.int/comm/sdt/en/stygd/index.htm> (23 August 1998).
3. Bay Area Editors' Forum. <http://www.editorsforum.org> (23 August 1998).