

IJIDI: Book Review

Younging, G. (2018). *Elements of Indigenous style: A guide for writing by and about Indigenous people*. [Edmonton, AB]: Brush Education. ISBN 9781550597122. 141 pp. \$19.95 US.

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International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion (IJIDI) readers, including academics, researchers, library practitioners, and graduate students will find this technical publication immensely helpful, particularly if they are writing or editing pieces with Indigenous content for publication. Gregory Younging, the Indigenous author of the book being reviewed, has decades of experience editing and publishing Indigenous content, and specifies that this text is intended for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous writers (academic or not), editors, and publishers. I highly recommend this book for those librarians, library and information science (LIS) professors, and instructors who are responsible for grading essays, and editing papers, articles, and book chapters. However, I would also recommend this book for all mainstream editors and publishers, especially those who may have unknowingly disrespected Indigenous thought and knowledge in the past and who are willing to learn to adopt more respectful editing and publishing practices. A multitude of technical writing issues are covered in this book; it will likely answer all of your questions related to how to respectfully present written ideas and knowledge involving Indigenous content. As Younging states, “a key goal of Indigenous style is to show respect on the page” (p. 87), respect for Indigenous Protocols, cultural property, and knowledge.

My first impression while reading the early parts of the book was that this was a technical publication with very “down to earth” and common-sense content related to writing by and about Indigenous peoples. There was not much new in the early sections for me as an Indigenous person, but for non-Indigenous editors and publishers, this could be an indispensable guide to build confidence and a foundation for learning and applying the basics of Indigenous writing style. In later sections of the book, the content helped clarify some elements of Indigenous style that I was unsure about as well as some new insights I had not gleaned previously, such as usage (or not) of certain terms (e.g., clans/Clans) and various sections of Younging’s Appendix D, “Gnaritas Nullius (No One’s Knowledge)”, which provides very interesting cases on Indigenous intellectual property rights and patents. Most readers may find the “22 Principles of Indigenous Style” (and the logic leading up to them) that are summarized in the book and listed in Appendix A to be the most useful aspect of the book. These range from the purpose of Indigenous style, to the recognition of Indigenous identity and cultural property (and thereby avoiding cultural appropriation), to working with Traditional Knowledge and Oral Tradition, to avoiding the use of inappropriate terminology, to the appropriate use of capitalization of certain terms, to the need for extreme sensitivity when editing and publishing works on Indigenous trauma, and to guidelines for avoiding the use of the past tense when writing about Indigenous peoples (and, of

course, much more).

Of particular interest to me in this book are the case studies contributed by other Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals, most of whom are involved in the publishing industry (including author and publisher collaborations). The first one focuses on the University of Regina Press (in Saskatchewan, Canada), which has hired three Indigenous staff, including office manager and manuscript reviewer, Wendy Whitebear. She writes about her considerable influence concerning Indigenous Protocols being followed by authors of potential publications with Indigenous content at the Press. For instance, she checks for whether or not the author has consulted with family members (if needed) or with Elders in this regard. Likewise, the Press' non-Indigenous publisher, Bruce Walsh, has contributed to this section, stating that all three Indigenous staff are at the decision-making table during meetings at the Press and their perspectives are valued: "they hear subtle bias in wording" (p. 5). Another exciting staffing initiative at the University of Regina Press is the hiring of an annual Indigenous intern as part of an apprenticeship program to build capacity of Indigenous peoples to learn the ins and outs of the publishing industry. Other case studies provided in the book also demonstrate valuable "best practices" for implementing Indigenous style.

IJIDI readers will also appreciate various social justice issues discussed throughout this book, particularly for Indigenous writers who prefer to engage in a professional relationship with editors and publishers who are interested in getting to know these Indigenous authors. Indigenous writers may also prefer to engage with publishers who understand that taking the time to develop respectful relationships with Indigenous writers is important and worthwhile. From my own experience working with non-Indigenous editors and publishers, I encountered, at best, those who floundered with knowing how to edit Indigenous content and who, in the end, learned to trust what I was writing and putting forward on the page. At worst, I've encountered dogmatic, oppressive, and adversarial non-Indigenous editors and publishers throughout the editing and publishing process. In the worst-case scenario, had I not needed the publication for various reasons, I would have dropped the project rather than suffer the indignation of being at the mercy of power-tripping editors and publishers. However, my options for publishing were limited due to a lack of mainstream library publishers who recognized the "market" for Indigenous publications (although this is currently improving). This type of situation should not happen to anyone; particularly people of color in the academy, whose responsibilities and burdens are great for every aspect of academia. Now that *Elements of Indigenous Style* has been published, there is no excuse for this type of treatment of Indigenous authors to happen again, especially if this book is well-promoted within the non-Indigenous editing and publishing communities.

One area where this book could be improved pertains to the section on Métis identity and terminology (p. 67-68). Missing in this section is a somewhat recent development of a false Métis identity group known as the Eastern Métis, or race-shifting, where non-Indigenous people in Quebec and provinces further east are taking strong measures to obtain Indigenous identity as a new kind of Métis people, without evidence to substantiate these claims (which are also being legally denied). The most troubling aspect of this movement is that these non-Indigenous peoples have been known to engage in anti-Indigenous racist comments and activism prior to joining this movement, which suggests that their motives for pursuing legal Indigenous status are disingenuous. (See Gaudry & Leroux, 2017, and Leroux, 2018, for more in this regard.) While this is a complex issue, it would be helpful, particularly for non-Indigenous people, to know that this is a currently troublesome movement and something to be aware of when contemplating Métis identity and terminology during the editing and publishing processes. Having said this, I

acknowledge that Younging has invited contributions to flesh out parts of the book that are lacking. In his Preface, he indicates that this book is just a starting point for defining elements of Indigenous style and encourages critique of his propositions in the book and “more comprehensive solutions” to defining Indigenous style as something to strive for in the future (p. xi-xii).

Also, keeping in mind that *IJIDI* readers are international in scope, it would be helpful to note that this book prioritizes the Indigenous writing, editing and publishing scene in Canada. A minor concern for some might be that there are a few instances where terminologies in the Canadian context are not issues in the U.S. context. However, that is not to say that those who live outside of Canada will not gain anything from reading *Elements of Indigenous Style*. Many of the principles discussed and outlined in the book will pertain to any Indigenous Nation, no matter their geographic location. For instance, the general advice provided to consult with the Indigenous Nation being written about to ensure accuracy would apply broadly. Younging also draws from content in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which is international in scope, as well as content from Indigenous cultural policies in Australia. Several sections in the appendices also include the thoughts of internationally-based Indigenous authors.

As stated earlier, I very much recommend purchasing a copy of this book, particularly for LIS editors and publishers as well as for mainstream editors and publishers. *Elements of Indigenous Style* endeavors to create a new (and more respectful) relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in the editing and publishing industries. I contend that, as readers of this journal, it is our social justice responsibility to promote the reading of this book and the application of its established principles as much as possible and to encourage editors and publishers to have this book at their fingertips when working with Indigenous content in forthcoming new publications as well as previously published work that is due for revision or a new edition.

ekosi maka (a *nêhiyaw* expression for “that’s all”).

References

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