Using Digital Projection for Editing Grand Jury Reports

By Barbara Sommer, Yolo County Grand Juror, 2008-9

An editing committee of nineteen can be a nightmare. The beast lives in Grand Jury procedure. I don’t know how general the procedure is, but Yolo County’s guidelines require that

- "Each grand jury member should read the report carefully and provide comments, corrections, or objections before or during the general meeting review. At that session, the grand jury decides what action to take on the report."

"If changes are required, the editing committee makes the appropriate revisions. Unless the jury has agreed to accept the report with agreed upon revisions, the report is then resubmitted to the grand jury for approval." (Yolo County Grand Jurors' Manual, 2009)

In practice that translates to a session in which each of the 19 jurors may suggest modifications to the report. The modifications range from discovering typos and conflicts over syntax to major revisions. In any case the report must be approved by a super majority (CGJA training manual, Final Report Writing, pg. 8).

The editing committee’s review, which in our case involves six members, can be difficult. Although in theory the entire body could agree to abide by the committee’s editing, that has not been the case. And rightly so. Despite our best efforts, there are inconsistencies and ambiguities noted by the larger body. A flawless report is the goal. Once in print, our words are there to show the public whether we have spent the year doing quality work or sloppy research.

The guidelines suggest that each juror could submit corrections or revisions. These could then be incorporated into the report by the editing committee, and final approval would easily follow. In fact this is not the case for several reasons. One is that jurors may be remiss with regard to doing their homework. Secondly, the suggestions and revisions received from various people may be contradictory. Thus, there doesn’t seem to be any substitute for the entire jury’s going over the report line by line.

We have discovered a way to facilitate the editing process at both the committee and full jury level. It requires a laptop computer, projector, and a report in Microsoft Word.

To prepare for the editing session,

1. Using Microsoft Word, protect the document -- from the top menu, select Tools > Protect Document. A window with a password option will appear -- no need to protect with a password.

2. Select the Tracked Changes radio button, and click OK.

3. Use the projector to project the document onto a screen or blank wall.

4. It is best to project the report in Normal View mode -- top menu, View > Normal). (The alternative, Page Layout, is not as clear in showing the edits.)

Delete or add material in the usual way. All modifications will be shown in color and can be modified as much as desired. There are default colors for deletions and additions. These can be changed using Preferences (top menu Word > Preferences > Track Changes).

When all the additions and revisions have been made to the jurors' satisfaction, the report is ready to be put in final form.


2. Select Tools > Track Changes > Accept or Reject Changes. A window will appear

3. Assuming that your report is in its final form (at least for this stage) you can ignore the information on the menu and simply click the Accept All button on the menu.

Another window will appear asking you if you want to accept the remaining changes without review. Click Yes.

You now have a clean version of the editing report. Save it and give it a modified name (so as not to confuse it later with the original).

If you wish to do further editing, repeat the above process.