Electronic-editing guide takes the wrong path

Chicago Guide to Preparing Electronic Manuscripts (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 144 pp., 1987, $9.95)

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Word processors have all but eliminated typewriters in document preparation. Newer word processors and the emerging desktop publishing software have shifted traditional typesetting burdens from typesetters and editors to authors and nonpublishing professionals. This shift requires a style guide for marking up the electronic manuscripts.

Standard copy-editing symbols let authors tell editors what they want the published manuscript to look like, and they let editors precisely specify to the typesetter how the final document should appear. No such style exists for electronic manuscripts.

The *Chicago Guide to Preparing Electronic Manuscripts* is an attempt by the publishers of the influential *Chicago Manual of Style* to address that need. Unfortunately, the guide is severely flawed, and its few valuable contributions are overshadowed by much incomplete, naive, and incorrect advice. It has four fundamental flaws that render it useless.

The first flaw is the coding structure. The guide's suggested codes miss many common functions and require manual translation and interpretation by editors and typesetters, missing a key point of electronic editing and typesetting: automating the repetitive, manual tasks. The standard Chicago copy-editing symbols for hard copy can be used by anyone in the publishing cycle, so it's especially disappointing that their electronic counterparts can't.

The second major flaw is the question of who does the editing. I realize the Chicago guide is based on book editing, where authors are more involved in the editing than in magazines, but to say that "the author is, by default, the one responsible for entering the editing changes" is ludicrous. If the editor marks up a printout and makes the author enter the changes, what's the point of the electronic version? The guide defends this approach by saying that having computer equipment pre-

vents data sharing and that it is difficult to keep an audit trail for electronic manuscripts. Both excuses are invalid — *IEEE Software* has addressed both successfully.

The third major flaw is that the guide is unfocused. The codes are too book-specific for the typical author, who also writes for journals, magazines, manuals, and proposals. Editors are barely mentioned even though they handle most of the publishing work, and typesetters aren't given the information they need to accept manuscripts electronically.

The fourth major flaw is a very naive and often cavalier attitude about using computers. Many assumptions about data formats and storage media were outdated when Apple IIs were the state of the art. The suggestion that a printout be sent to the typesetter with electronic submissions shows just how much the guide's authors trust their own techniques.

The questions raised by electronic editing are many. But don't look here for the answers.

RS 102