careful with how we mark other changes, authors who see that we’ve crossed out a word will believe that we’ve done so for a good reason, not because we were careless.

Be careful when you suggest moving large blocks of text. When you believe that a large block of text would fit better in another part of a manuscript, and when you also need to edit that text block, I recommend following a procedure outlined by Hart: “turn off revision tracking, cut the text from its original location, insert a comment to explain the disappearance of the text (i.e., its move to a new location), paste the text in its new location, insert a comment to explain the sudden appearance of the new text, then turn on revision tracking again so you can edit the moved text.” With that procedure, because revision tracking is not turned back on until after the text has been moved to its new position, your editorial suggestions for the moved text block will be clear to the author. (In contrast, if revision tracking is turned on at the time when the text is moved to its new position, “the software will track all of the inserted text as a single insertion and all your changes will become part of the same insertion, forcing the author to examine it carefully, looking for changes.”) Because there is no "suggested-deletion" version of the passage hanging around in its original position, there should be no risk that the author will accidentally end up with two versions of the passage in the final document.

Check documents before returning them to the author. Before sending an edited document back to the author, scan through it with tracked changes showing and with tracked changes hidden. You might be surprised by what shows up in the changes-hidden view. A common problem is for adjacent words to run together ("runtogether"). Also, if you tend to toggle revision tracking on and off as you work, you might find that some of your queries are composed of a mix of tracked changes and standard text—hard for an author to deal with. Another problem I often find is that the format for inline queries is not consistent. I usually format such queries as bold and underlined, but sometimes I’ll type my keyboard shortcuts sloppily and the underlining will get left out, a fact that doesn’t become apparent until I switch to changes-hidden view. This is not a big deal, but documents look nicer and queries are easier to spot if the query formatting is consistent throughout.

Help authors understand how to use revision tracking efficiently. Several of my colleagues have standard “tips on using Track Changes” instructions that they e-mail to authors when they return edited papers. I think that’s a great idea. Also, if authors express interest, you can offer to serve as a resource for software-related questions. One author I worked with expressed more gratitude for my showing him how to turn off the balloons in Microsoft Word than he did for all the editorial work I had ever done for him.

Spend an extra 15 minutes to save an author 45. An important point that I hadn’t thought about until I read Hart’s book is that for those of us who are paid by institutions or departments, it may be appropriate for us to spend a few minutes extra in making revisions easier to handle rather than to work as quickly as possible. Why? Our extra 15 minutes might save an author an hour’s worth of work because many authors aren’t as proficient with word processing as we are. Some clearly are—like the authors who send me beautifully formatted documents with fancy use of styles and embedded graphics—but most aren’t. And any author will appreciate spending less time on revision and having more time for other pursuits—or maybe just to relax!

Additional Suggestions?
If you have additional tips for editing onscreen in an author-friendly manner, I’d love to receive them for possible inclusion in a future column.

Reference

Erratum
On page 175 of the September–October 2009 issue of Science Editor, the wording at the end of the last full paragraph in the first column should be “May–June 2005, p 106–107”.