

How to be
a successful

Editor

Second Edition

by John Mason and
Staff of ACS Distance Education

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CREDITS

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The information in this book is derived from a broad cross section of resources (research, reference materials and personal experience) from the authors and editorial assistants in the academic department of ACS Distance Education. It is, to the best of our knowledge, composed as an accurate representation of what is accepted and appropriate information about the subject, at the time of publication.

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PREFACE

For some, editing is a necessary evil. They are in a hurry to turn ideas into words. After the initial writing, however, it is important to take time to reflect on your work, to look at the content, flow, grammar, and more. When we skip this vital step, we do ourselves and our readers a disservice. Why? Editing ensures clear, direct, and effective communication. The writer's ideas flow to the reader; the reader has a clear view of concepts expressed.

Many books detail the processes involved in editing, but this is not enough to be a successful editor. Throughout this book, you'll learn aspects of the "standard" process; you'll also learn a few tips and tricks used by long-time editors in a variety of fields.

The first thing an editor needs is patience. Yet this is not enough – in today's ever-changing world, successful editors must be patient and pragmatic, skilled at interpreting briefs and keeping within budgets. Most work today is limited by time and money. This means you must be able to work within the parameters set. If a client or employer tells you they need a job completed by a deadline, or kept within a set budget, or to focus on a particular aspect of text, you must stay within the bounds of their ask, and your contract.

CHAPTER 1 HOW MUCH EDITING?

Like all industries, editing has evolved over the years. Individuals and companies who have not adapted to these changes have not fared so well. Whilst the emergence of sophisticated editing software and changes in publishing formats may have contributed to the loss of some jobs, they have also opened up new avenues for the industry.

Introduction

Until the advent of the 20th century, publishing usually meant printing. Printing required significant resources, meaning only a select few writers were published. The effort of acquisition and printing meant publishing houses were heavily invested in creating “perfect” documents, and editors were in high demand.

Today, anyone can write and publish material online. Blogs, websites and other online materials now draw high levels of readership, and print sales show a decline. As a result, there are often fewer resources allocated to editing across print and electronic formats. The good news is that there are more publications, and hence more opportunities for the savvy editor to find work.

Publishing is a business. If it doesn't pay, you will soon be out of business. If it barely pays, you will barely survive. If you make lots of money, you are more likely to be able to survive and grow your business. This is just as true for an editor or proof reader as it is for a publisher who engages their services.

Finding a Balance and Setting Priorities

Editors work across multiple roles, with many potential responsibilities. These may include checking a document for technical accuracy, styling, spelling, grammar, and layout. The client – an independent author or publishing house – may consult with you on the work to be done, but the ultimate decision lies with them. Different employers may have different priorities; it is important you recognise the difference between the work you wish to do and the work you are hired to do. This is especially important if these two things are not in alignment.

