

LESSON 1 HOW MUCH EDITING?

Like all industries, editing is always evolving. This means freelancers, companies, and publishers are always in the process of adapting. While 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. These changes in the industry mean that there are new jobs available, such as editorial work for websites, online journals, and proofreading for bloggers, influencers, and self-published authors.

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 survive and grow your business. This is just as true for an editor or proofreader 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.



Suggested Tasks: ▼

Throughout this course you will be provided with suggested tasks and reading to aid with your understanding. These will appear in the right hand column. Remember: these tasks are optional. The more tasks you complete, the more you will learn, but in order to complete the course in 20 hours you will need to manage your time well. We suggest you spend about 10 minutes on each task you attempt, and no more than 20 minutes.

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Suggested Tasks

Do an Internet search using key words such as “Editing Jobs” or “Freelance Editing Work” and look at the array of different jobs that come up.

Identify two jobs that might be of interest to you personally.

Spend no more than 10 minutes on this task.

Why Are You Editing?

Prospective clients usually have a set of tasks or problems in mind when hiring an editor. Speak with them about this. During your consultation, determine a clear set of tasks and expectations before you begin work on a project. If the client wishes to contract you for work that is normally outside the editor's role, be clear about the type of work you can and cannot do. Do not take on work you cannot complete. If necessary, decline the project.

An editor needs to identify, understand and respect the expectations of their employer. An editor may have one employer – say, a publisher – but there are also other people looking at their work.

Editors may work for:

- The author(s)
- The publisher
- The audience

The author writes the book. The editor edits the book. These are clearly defined roles. Unless specifically asked, the editor must not change the author's style or voice. Always respect the author's wishes. An author engages an editor to help with the text, not to rewrite it. If the text does require a rewrite, speak with your client. It is important to remember that rewriting and developing text is a specialty skill.

Do pay attention to grammatical errors, potential miscommunications, spelling errors, and awkward or incorrect syntax. Depending on the scope of the project, you may include structure notes as

well. If you are uncomfortable with the content of the work, you may decline it.

The publisher is the person who will publish the work, in print or online. The publisher will have set guidelines and requirements for the work that appears in their publications. The editor will need to be aware of these guidelines to ensure they are providing a good service for the publisher. Many publishers – also referred to as “houses” – have in-house style guides.

A style guide is a set of standards for writing and designing documents. Some publishers will have detailed, in-house style guides. Others will use existing style guides. Different style guides have different types of formatting, grammatical layout, citation use, and more. You will find several examples of well-known style guides online.

Spend time familiarising yourself with common style guides. If you are working with a publisher, ask for a copy of their style guide. If you know your prospective client will use a particular style guide, familiarise yourself with it before speaking with the client.

Finally, the editor is working for the audience. The single defining aspect of an editor's work is clarity. Understanding the audience and the audience perspective helps the editor bring clarity to the text. It is important to remember that the audience may have varying levels of knowledge and experience. Many authors forget this. As such, ensure you establish the purpose of your client's project: ask about their goals and their audience. Do this before you start work.

Good editors also consider the market

or industry, the author's intent, and other publications in the space. Using this information, they can assess a manuscript for clarity, and make suggestions as necessary.

Sometimes, however, the lack of harmony or understanding between the intended audience and the author's style of communication is clear. For example, if you are editing an article about climate change, the author's use of jargon may seem appropriate – for adults. If the intended audience is children 8 to 12, such jargon is likely inappropriate. Keeping the intended audience in mind is essential.

As an editor, you will discover editing is often a balancing act – you are trying to please publisher, author, and audience at once. At the end of the day, however, you are reporting to your client. If the client is the publisher, then they are your primary concern. If the client is the author, you must report to the author first. Such relationships must be defined before you start work.

Fiction and Non-Fiction

We will discuss different types of editing later in this book, but one major distinction across editing is fiction and non-fiction. Some editors focus on one or the other, but many are flexible and work on documents in both fields of writing. New editors are likely to take work as it comes rather than specialise, so awareness of how the two vary is

Editing Fiction

Fiction is an overarching category encompassing fictive or imaginative works. It includes verse, short stories, novellas, novels, and more. The type of editing required will vary according to the type of text.

Some authors write wondrous stories and poetry but lack concrete spelling and grammar. Even with the help of spell check and grammar check, their work may be strewn with errors. Editing this type of work may be closer to proof reading or copyediting, with only minor sentence notes.

Other fiction editing requires a more considered approach. You may need to help with reorganising the structure of the work to improve flow, or make suggestions on expression or content. This requires a greater understanding of the author's intentions and more skill to execute.

To edit poetry which adheres to particular rules of meter, you will need to be familiar with feet, rhythm and other elements. However, a lot of modern poetry is more freeform and less rigid. Although this type of poetry may seem easy to edit, there is often an underlying form or structure, and the poet's intent must be respected. Do not take a red pen to all potential "errors" or "misspellings". Use editorial queries to ensure the spelling or grammar used reflects the creator's intent. Do not take on poetry unless you are familiar with it.

Generally speaking, fiction is written to appeal to people's emotions. As such, the editor must be attuned to the feelings the author is attempting

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Suggested Tasks

- 1) List six categories of fiction that you may have recently read or heard about. Examples may be: crime, poetry and so on.
- 2) For one of the categories you listed above, identify three characteristics that cause the publication to fall into this category.

For example, a crime novel might require an unsolved crime, detective work and suspense.

- 3) In which of these categories do you think you might like to work as an editor?

to convey.

Editing Non-fiction

Unlike fiction, most non-fiction is written to convey information, facts and figures. Information must be accurate; in most cases, the text must also be concise. Part of the editor's role is to check facts for accuracy as well as to ensure the work is free from grammatical and spelling errors.

Some areas of non-fiction may require the editor to have a degree or experience in a related field. For instance, editing a medical journal article may require the editor to have a degree in medical sciences or substantial knowledge and experience within the field. Editing a legal document may require a law degree or experience as a legal secretary. Yet this is not always the case – some editors work within niche fields without possessing an industry qualification. (In these cases, the editor usually has substantial knowledge or industry experience.)



Another area of non-fiction which has grown in recent years is creative non-fiction. This style of writing is a marriage between fiction and non-fiction styles. It uses literary techniques to discuss or explore factual topics. When working with non-fiction, it is important that the editor respect any privacy issues within the manuscript, and discuss potential concerns with the author. This is particularly important today given issues regarding privacy, confidentiality and the law. People are much more likely to sue for libel and defamation. Even if a fact is true, the author may still be sued in certain circumstances.

Personality Traits of Editors

Some people believe in the idea of the “natural editor”. Natural editors are people who have an eye for detail and a feel for how something should read. Indeed, some people are naturally talented in this way. They are often the type of people who spend a lot of their spare time reading. They also tend to spot errors easily and may even scour written work to find them. A natural aptitude for editing is not required, however. Many people develop excellent editing skills over time. The only true prerequisite to become an editor is a willingness to work hard.

What do you need to be a good editor?

A good editor is detail-oriented. Other useful traits include being:

- organised and orderly

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Suggested Tasks

Do an Internet search for freelance editing jobs and look at the expected turnaround times required to get a document edited. Compare how this may vary with the length of the document (e.g. word or page number). Spend no more than 15 minutes researching this.