

S A M P L E

Introduction to Editing

Lesson Aim

To gain an understanding of the role and scope of editing.

THE ROLE AND SCOPE OF EDITING

Very few people can immediately write a lucid and well-expressed piece of work. In most cases, the final draft is smoothed and polished so that others can readily understand the writer's message. It is the editor's role to improve the quality of the writing, whether their own or someone else's work.

The scope of editing ranges from self editing, where the writer examines their writing and improves it as best they can, to professional editing, where an expert is employed by a publishing company to improve the quality of a piece of writing prior to publication.

There are many other facets of commercial publishing that require the skills of professional editors. These include commissioning publications; reviewing manuscripts; overseeing manuscripts through the production process; liaising with writers, publishers, printers and agents; writing blurbs, captions and press releases; and researching and organising pictures. In smaller organisations the editor may also be responsible for the design and publication of documents, newsletters, reports, magazines and books using desktop publishing software and equipment.

Editing involves several stages, which will be examined in detail during this course. In summary, they are:

1. Reviewing the manuscript (A manuscript or MS is a handwritten or typed document that is created rather than printed or created by an automated process. So, if an author writes a book on his computer, this would then be the manuscript).
2. Structural (substantive) editing – This is also known as developmental and comprehensive editing. The editor will consider the concept of the document and its intended use, content, design, style and organisation. The purpose of substantive editing is to make the manuscript functional for the reader. It is not just about making the document correct.
3. Copy editing – Copy editing takes the copy or manuscript (the copy) and prepare it for publication. The aim is to ensure that it is as accurate as possible, easy to follow, free of errors, repetition and inconsistency. It should also pick up mistakes, anomalies, possible legal problems and so on.
4. Proof reading – After material has been copy edited, the publisher will send it to a typesetter or designer to prepare a proof. The proofreading process is where the proof is checked for quality and tidied up. Proof readers will find errors. We will look at proof reading symbols shortly. Proof reading may be done on paper or electronically. Some proof readers prefer to have printed copies of a proof to edit. This will then be presented more as it will appear to the reader (if it is a paper-based book). Some proof readers will edit online. Because of this, proof-reading symbols are still used. So, it is important for any editor or proof reader to understand how to use traditional proof-reading symbols and also how to proof read electronically.
5. Checking proofs.

WHAT DOES AN EDITOR DO?

Every editing job is different in some respect from others, and different editors may be responsible for different tasks. In general, editors do any or all of the following (or may delegate some tasks to others):

- Correct language errors, such as poor grammar, incorrect spelling and punctuation, and ambiguities.
- Identify technical inaccuracies (e.g. in a non-fiction book).
- Improve conciseness and clarity, if and where this is of significance.
- Identify potential legal problems, such as plagiarism, ethical or moral problems, copyright infringements, defamation risks.
- Check for uniformity and appropriateness of content and style and make or recommend adjustments if necessary.
- Determine whether the content of a manuscript should be deleted or replaced (usually with approval from both the author and publisher).
- Determine whether additional content is required within a manuscript (usually with approval from both the author and publisher).
- Determine the order in which the manuscript is to be published.
- Liaise with all other persons involved in the production of the publication.
- Check and clear copyright material to be used in the publication (for instance, anything which is not the original work of the author should be properly referenced and used only in accordance with the law in any jurisdiction relevant to the publication).
- Prepare preliminary pages and cover, and mark up any end matter, usually in collaboration with the author.
- Prepare instructions for others involved in production, such as the designer, illustrator, typesetter and printer. This may involve marking up the manuscript, preparing a series of 'briefs' and, in some cases, contract or tender documents)
- Select illustrations, including photographs, tables and drawings from material submitted by the author.
- Identify and source additional illustrations if required (from the author or elsewhere).
- Write marketing material if required (often in collaboration with the author and/or the marketing staff).
- Monitor (and sometimes control) production schedules.
- Check proofs at each stage of production.
- Maintain a record of corrections after production for use in any reprints or new edition.

TOOLS FOR EDITING

A computer with an up-to-date word processing program is vital for anyone considering a career as an editor. These days almost all publications are produced electronically and, even though you will probably receive a printed copy of the manuscript, most of the editing process is done on screen.

You will also need a compatible printer – preferably a laser printer if you are self-publishing or regularly edit long manuscripts – and a modem connected to the Internet.

It may be advantageous for freelance editors to have a quality desktop publishing program such as QuarkXPress or Adobe PageMaker or FrameMaker. These programs are used by publishers and printers to produce end-quality work, and some smaller publishers prefer to employ editors who can competently use these programs.

Essential stationery includes post-it notes, a calculator, highlighter pens, pencils, and blue and red biros.

Useful Reference Books
A comprehensive dictionary
A thesaurus

EDITING SKILLS

A competent editor has the following skills:

- Good computer skills
- Excellent communication skills – both verbal and written
- Good organisational skills
- The ability to meet deadlines
- A logical mind
- An eye for detail
- An understanding of the print production processes.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD EDITOR?

The best editors are able to work according to the requirements of a job, changing the intensity and detail of their editing according to each different situation they are faced with.

Editors should be impartial, objective and unhindered by prejudices.

Good editors are not pedantic. They are pragmatic.

Above all, a good editor is one who can improve communication with the readers.

Editors may be freelancers, or they may be in-house editors, meaning that they work for the publishers *in house*. Freelance editors may work for a number of different publishers. They will usually be self-employed or running their own company.

Production editors will oversee the entire process from manuscript through to publication online or on paper. He/she will work with authors, artists, editors, typesetters, marketing and so on to make sure that there is a smooth transition from the initial idea to the reader. So good communication skills are essential.

Commissioning editors are basically purchasers. They advise the publishing house on which books or articles to purchase. So, a good awareness of the market for that product is essential.

Finding a Balance and Setting Priorities

You are far more likely to succeed as an editor (or proof reader) if you understand your industry, where it has been and where it is going, and approach your work with a realistic understanding of what the client (or employer) wants and is prepared to pay for.

In today's world, speed and money are more important than in the past. Everything changes very fast today; writing can very quickly lose relevance.

In the 20th century and earlier most publishing was printed, and most people never had their work published. There was less published and less available to read. When articles were written, the content would remain relevant and topical for months if not years. Writers could take time to write something, editors could take time to edit, and publishers would take time to get something published.

In the old world of print, less was published, but it was more often pondered over and perfected as much as was possible. When there was less published, there was less to read and those articles which were published were often read more and valued greatest.

Things have changed though. Anyone can write and publish their written work electronically today. Many people do just that. Blogs, web sites and online newsletters have taken many readers away from large book, magazine and newspaper publishers. The result is obvious - there is often less money and less manpower available to edit, per publication (both print and electronic).

The good news is there are more publications now and therefore more opportunities to be employed to work on publications. Publishing is a business. If it doesn't pay, you will be out of business. If it barely pays you will barely survive. If it is successful, you are more likely to grow. This is just as true for an editor or proof reader, as it is for a publisher who engages their services.

Different clients and employers will set different priorities. For some speed and cost is just as important as technical accuracy, styling, spelling, grammar, visual quality and other such factors. Many publishers will talk about "tolerating" a certain level of errors (e.g. one publisher may indicate they have a policy to tolerate a small number of errors in the published material, until the upper tolerable limit is reached. A common acceptable number in education publications is 10 different errors).

Obviously, a client or employer will always want to minimise errors, but they will also want to minimize cost, speed the production time, and above all maximise profit. If imperfections impact on profit, they will want to find and correct those imperfections but when the cost of finding imperfections becomes greater than the benefit, those issues simply become unworthy of resources.

Danger Signs!

Editors can fall into behavioural patterns which simply do not enhance the quality of their work. The following should be watched for and avoided:

**Adhering to certain rules irrespective of whether or not they improve communication*

For example, changing the word 'till' to 'until' throughout a document even though it really does not improve communication.

**Not matching the effort put into editing with the work being edited*

It serves little purpose spending excessive time editing a piece of writing destined for a publication operating on a tight budget. It may be reasonable to edit fine points for an English grammar text book or a novel by a best-selling author, but the additional effort and time may not be appropriate for a local sporting club newsletter.

**Pondering for a long time over a change that could be made in seconds*

While some changes might require careful consideration, others are not so significant, and an editor can waste precious time deciding whether or not to make the change or deciding what kind of change to make. If the results either way are not significant, it is best to make a decision quickly rather than seek perfection.

**Continually cross-checking for consistency of minor points*

If the editor cannot remember what came before, and the point is of no serious technical consequence, it is unlikely many of the readers will notice or worry about it. Consider whether it is really worth spending a lot of time and expense to achieve perfect consistency when a negligible number of readers (if any) will even notice that effort.

**Changing voice in order to achieve consistency*

It is not very important to change voice (e.g. passive to active voice or vice versa) to achieve consistency. More important reasons for changing voice are to reduce word count, improve clarity, or make a piece of writing more concise.

**Concentrating on unused space rather than used space in a layout*

There is no reason to increase the number of words or lengths of sentences or paragraphs to avoid blank areas on a page (e.g. at a chapter's end). Blank space can provide visual relief and variety. Every word should contribute value to the document.

**Checking page proofs repeatedly*

Some editors don't recognise their own limitations. Making multiple checks of a manuscript will still not bring a fresh perspective to the task, and errors can still be overlooked. It is best to ask someone else to assist with checking.

**Failing to delegate*

Editors who think no one else can do tasks as well as they can may fail to incorporate and balance the contributions made by others involved in the publishing process – the writers, illustrators, publishers, and layout artists. Others can bring other skills and perspectives to a task, resulting in a better overall product.

DO NOT OVER EDIT!

Some publications warrant a great deal more editing than others. Some publications simply do not have a budget that can justify any more than basic editing.

THE PUBLISHING TEAM

Some publishing businesses are small with multi-skilled staff. Most medium to large publishing businesses, however, will employ a team of people, each with a well-defined role. Following are some of the people an editor may need to work with in a publishing business:

- **The Publisher** is concerned with planning and management of the publishing business. The publisher is often, but not always, the boss or CEO. The publisher's particular concerns are to commission new work, negotiate the acquisition of existing work (e.g. out-of-print titles that have been released from another publisher), assess and decide on the future of existing titles, and develop new areas of work. The publisher also needs to deal with unsolicited submissions, and with agents of authors. The publisher should maintain contact with authors (though the extent of such contact varies between publishers). The publisher needs to liaise with other sections of a publishing business in order to do their job properly: the editor, the marketing department, etc.
- **The Business Manager** may be responsible for the day-to-day management of either part or all of a publishing business. Some large publishers employ a team of business managers, putting each one in charge of a different group of publications (e.g. a business manager for non-fiction and another for fiction, one for women's magazines and another for business magazines).
- **The Production Manager** or production assistant is responsible for coordinating and overseeing each of the physical stages in the production of a publication. A small publishing business may assign this task to an editor, or the publisher. A large business may employ several production managers.
- **The Designer** has the task of taking instructions from the editor and producing the final layout.
- **Marketing Staff** have the task of selling a publication. The editor should explain to these people the concept of the publication. The editor and author will have developed the book with a particular market in mind, and those thoughts must be conveyed to the marketing staff.

THE PRODUCTION PROCESS – AN OVERVIEW

The following is a summary of the production process in commercial publishing:

- **Manuscript** – this may be an unsolicited document sent 'on spec' to a publishing house, or a manuscript sent by a literary agent, or a book or publication commissioned by the publisher. The manuscript can be in various forms, for example handwritten or digital.
- **Editing** – a copy editor edits and marks up the manuscript
- **Desktop publishing (DTP)** is creating documents using a computer to design how the page is laid out. They will produce quality text and images.

- Design – a designer commissions illustrations, designs the text, sizes and places the illustrations, and designs the cover
- Typesetting – a typesetter or desktop publisher sets the text and non-text material according to the editor's and designer's mark-up
- Galley Proofs – the typesetter provides galley proofs (proofs of the typeset text before they are divided into pages); the editor, author and proof reader check the galleys for errors
- Page Proofs – the corrected galleys are pasted up into pages by the designer, or laid out using desktop publishing software
- Index – the author or indexer prepares the index from the final page proofs
- Dyelines – the printer films the pages and sends a set of dyelines to the editor and designer for checking
- Colour Proofs – the designer checks and corrects the colour separations
- Advance Copies – these are provided for publicity and review purposes; the editor checks for any significant printing errors.

The Production Schedule

Once a publication goes to an editor, a production schedule may be drawn up. This can be a simple or complex document and may be done in a variety of ways. It should be ordered to allow control of a systematic progression through a series of stages, commencing with initial editing and culminating in the completion of the publication, as in the example table shown as follows.

Table: Sample production schedule

| Stage of Production | Date Scheduled | Actual Date | Notes |
|--|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| <i>Editing</i> Delivery of MS to editor Editor to author Return from author to editor Editor to designer | | | |
| <i>Production</i> Tenders sought Budget finalised | | | |
| <i>Design</i> Sample setting requested Sample setting approved Illustrator appointed MS to layout artist | | | |
| <i>Developing the Cover</i> Develop concepts Select concept Rough sample Approved Proof | | | |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| Colour separation | | | |
| <i>Developing the Index</i> Proofs to author Index to editor Index to designer/typesetter | | | |
| <i>Illustrations</i> Received from author Additional illustrations commissioned All illustrations with editor Illustrations & captions to designer | | | |
| <i>Proofs</i> Galley to editor to author to designer Final Pages to editor to author to designer | | | |
| <i>Printer</i> Artwork to printer/typesetter Galley to publisher Dyelines to publisher | | | |
| <i>Completion</i> Delivery of printed publication Launch meeting Distribute advance copies Launch | | | |

SET TASK

Activity 1

Every editor needs good resource files – files that list details of useful references and contacts. Start compiling your resource file now. Your resource file might include details of reference books, magazine and book publishers, professional writing and editing societies, and web pages.

You can store the information in a computer file, database, or spreadsheet. We suggest one file or worksheet per resource (person, book, organisation, or other resource item you have located). For example, files with information on publishers should be filed under "P" for publisher, with each publisher arranged in alphabetical order. Each file should include the publisher's name, address, phone, the type of material they publish, some examples of publications, names of any contact persons, and any other information of interest.