

# AN EDITOR'S WORK

*Or, what editors do and how to find one*

## SECTION ONE: Types of Edits

*Looking at the big picture, noticing the details*

### **Content Edit** (*Developmental or Substantive editing*)

1. Seeing the Big Picture
2. Story Structure
3. Plot-points, Timeline

### **Line Edit**

1. Narrowing the Focus
2. Scenes and paragraphs
3. Flow and rhythm
4. Streamlining the pages
5. Tighten prose, ensure consistency in language and style, and **enhance your voice** to best serve the story. I include comments and suggestions as needed. This is a specialized area of editing—not everyone will 'get' your voice, not everyone understands how to strengthen voices. Their advice should make your writing sound the clearest, most efficient version of you

### **Copyedit** (*Also erroneously known as proofreading*)

1. Noticing the Details
2. Sentences and words
3. Punctuation and spelling
4. Technicalities and consistency
5. This is the nuts-and-bolts edit. Polish grammar, syntax, spelling, punctuation, and look for any discrepancies in the manuscript. This is likely the final step before you get the book ready for publication. It's the most-commonly required edit and happens before a proofread. Also the most wide-ranging category of editing—can be light (for experienced writers or previously edited works) or heavy (for un-line-edited works or inexperienced writers)

## **Proofread** (*Reading the Galleys or Proofs*)

1. Perfecting the Product
2. Strictly the details
3. Punctuation, spelling and spacing
4. Proofreading (usually) happens *after* a book is formatted (reading the proofs or galleys in book format). It's the final-final step before you hit the 'publish' button. Look for any formatting issues or typos that valiantly made it past the copy-editing stage. (nowadays it's usually a formatted Word doc instead of a hard copy, and I almost never have a previous version to compare it to)

## SECTION TWO: Self-Editing

### **The Easy Stuff** (*You can totally do this yourself*)

1. Use your dictionary/thesaurus/spellchecker.  
Find or Find/Replace is super-handy to look for frequency of words (look/walk/turn/just/very) in general as well as page frequency. Seeing four 'look's on a page can be eye-catching and not in a good way.
2. Check for common issues. This can be universal *and* personal.  
If you know you love and overuse exclamation points, do a search or set a limit for yourself (I'm only using it seventy-five times—no more). Do you get confused whether to use I or me? Find all instances and check them. Use built-in doc checker.
3. Frequently used words/phrases (keep a list)  
We all have our pet words or default language and while a little bit is usually fine, overusing words can become distracting to the reader. If you know what yours are you can use the above tricks.
4. Passive language  
(Zombies!)
5. The ever-loving comma and other punctuation woes  
There are some punctuation issues that simply trip us up every time—semi-colons, commas...

### **The Hard Stuff** (*You might want to consider outside help*)

1. Matters of structure and style (Content editing)
  - a. Tone of voice/formality
  - b. Point of view (POV)
  - c. Past/Present tense
2. Fluid narration (Content or Line editing)
3. Easy dialogue (Content or Line editing)

## Rules of Writing *(or guidelines to keep in mind)*

1. There are rules for a reason.
  - a. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) make life easier.
  - b. The story should stand out. The mechanics of telling it invisible.
2. But sometimes they're simply guidelines.
  - a. Know the rules before you break them.
  - b. Have a good reason for breaking them.
3. Trust the Reader.
  - a. Assume they are at least as smart as you are.
  - b. Assume they'll figure things out before you tell them.
  - c. They notice when you're over-explaining (and might put your book down because of it).

## SECTION THREE: Finding an Editor

### *Knowing what you need and where to look*

#### Where to Look

1. Word of mouth: ask friends or inquire in writers' circles
2. Facebook Groups/Instagram/Twitter (search by keyword or hashtag)
3. ACES (*American Copy Editors' Society*) [Aceseditors.org](http://Aceseditors.org)
4. EFA (*The Editorial Freelancer's Association*) [The-efa.org](http://The-efa.org)
5. Kindle Boards Yellow Pages [Kboards.com](http://Kboards.com)
6. Good old-fashioned Web-search (e.g.—YA editor)

## Things to Consider

### What's Your Genre?

1. Editing can be very genre-specific. Find one who specializes in, or is at least familiar with, your genre.
2. Dev. editors will help you nail down tropes and meet reader expectations.

### What's Your Budget?

1. The more in-depth your edit, the more it will cost.
2. There really are good editors at most price-points but be wary of 'cheapest'.
3. If you cannot buy the dress, do not try on the dress. (or in this case, if you know you can only afford a copyedit, don't audition for line editors)

### Where you are in the Process?

1. Is this your first draft? Third? Seventh?
2. Dev. editors work with manuscripts in early stages, even as coaches while you're planning.
3. Proofreaders want a practically finished product.

### What's Your Timeline?

1. Allow as much time as possible for edits and your own revisions.
2. Know that quick turnarounds may result in higher price-tags.

## **Auditioning the Editors:** *Samples and Evaluations*

1. Most editors offer **samples**. Take them up on it! Some offer **consultations**. Ask for one, especially if you're trying to decide between two or three editors.
2. Questions to keep in mind:
  - a. Does the editor 'get' your vision?
  - b. Do you get along well?
  - c. Do they fit your criteria for budget/timeline? If not, are you willing/able to be flexible?
3. When gathering/assessing samples, please be kind and inform all editors of your final decision. We would rather know you went with someone else than feel ghosted.

## SECTION FOUR: The Writer/Editor Partnership

### *The ins and outs of working with an editor*

## **Submitting a Manuscript**

1. Before you submit a manuscript, please self-edit. Allow yourself time to write your story, put it away, and come back to it (at least once) before shipping it off to an editor. This process will vary depending on the type of editing you'll receive.
2. Use the editor's preferred formatting. Not sure? Start here:
  - a. Word, unless otherwise specified
  - b. Double-spaced, unless otherwise specified
  - c. Easy-to-read font (my favorite is Times New Roman)
  - d. With header/footer, unless otherwise specified (author/title/page)
3. What to expect, and what the editor is expecting
  - a. Clear and Timely communication goes both ways
  - b. Contract and Invoice which protects both parties
  - c. Trust that the client has submitted a work-ready manuscript and that the editor will do excellent work to the betterment of the project

4. How to be an awesome client:
  - a. Be patient: editors work as fast as we reasonably can to give you excellent work.
  - b. Seriously consider what we have chosen to suggest. Editors work hard to make sure the story seems to tell itself. No matter how much you might love a word, sentence, paragraph or scene, if it doesn't fit the story, they will probably suggest to strike it.
  - c. Communicate with your editor—let them know how revisions are going, ask questions, and let them know when you release the book-baby into the world.
  - d. Share a review for excellent work.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

### **An Editor's Job** *(the rules according to me)*

1. Make the Author look awesome.  
*Listen to the music of the author's language. Maintain their voice.*
2. Work in service to the story.  
*Recognize that it's not about me (the editor). It's not even about the author. (although it is about their vision)*
3. Wear your invisibility cloak.  
*Make the author look brilliant and their writing look effortless.*

### **On Editing and the English Language**

[Dreyer's English \(Benjamin Dreyer\)](#)

[Between You and Me \(Mary Norris\)](#)

[Chicago Manual of Style](#)

[The Synonym Finder \(J. I. Rodale\)](#)

[Our Magnificent Bastard Tongue \(John McWhorter\)](#)

### **On Writing**

[Bird by Bird \(Anne Lamott\)](#)

[On Writing \(Stephen King\)](#)