

TIME FOR AN EDITOR

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2. What Editor Should I Hire?

If you've decided to hire an editor, how do you do it and who should it be? We have already talked in this series about what an editor can and can't do to help improve your writing skills and in making your work publishable.

But before you hire an editor and invest hundreds or even a thousand dollars or more, *you need to understand:*

- the different stages of writing and revising in the editing process.
- the different levels of editing available.
- exactly what services particular editors provide.

Of course, *you need self-awareness* about:

- where you are at in the writing and revising process.
- whether your manuscript really is ready for an editor's help, or if you need to do more self-editing and get help from your team.
- what kind of editing help you would benefit from.

And *you need to think about your motivation:*

- If it's only to succeed in getting published and/or selling lots of books, an editor can certainly propel you in the right direction—but remember that in the end there are no guarantees of highly successful publishing (unless perhaps you're someone famous with a huge fan club).
- If your motivation, however, is for long-term writing improvement and career growth—in other words, if you're investing in your writing future—a qualified editor can be an important step in that process.

That said, here are some considerations in hiring a freelance professional editor.

To find possible freelance editors:

- Check out editors' associations. Most major nations have associations that provide editing education and accreditation. Canada's main association is called *Editors Canada*. There are also associations for particular types of writers, which also list approved editors. Examples are *The Word Guild* (for Christian writers in Canada) and the *Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators*.
- Check out editors' websites. Editors should list their educational background related to editing, as well as their editing experience, and the types of editing they specialize in. There should be a list of materials they have edited. You will want to look at some of the works to check out the quality of editing, as well as consider whether the editor has worked with written materials similar to yours. Most editors focus on one or two editing levels, and/or specialize in certain genre(s) and/or writing forms and formats. Check for traditional publishers and literary agents that editors may have worked with or who have published books they edited, as well as self-publishing authors they've worked with.
- Also, do an online search for an editor's name. Check out the various sites that mention the author in order to gain a broader perspective on their editing, writing, and other activities, such as their career path, volunteer activities, and hobbies or interests that may give them insight into your book's topic. Look at their Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and/or other social media pages, as well as writing-related pages on these sites which they contribute to.
- Check books that are similar to your work, in genre or type or subject, and that have been successful, including having good editing. Check the copyright page and/or the author's acknowledgments for editor information.
- Talk to writers in your local writing group, in regional writing groups, or in writing groups specific to your genre or subject, and ask for references to quality editors.
- If you go to writing conferences, you can often meet editors and talk with them. Take along your synopsis and/or proposal, and a sample of your work, as you might have the chance to speak one-on-one with an editor you are interested in. Check the conference website ahead of time to make a reservation for a one-on-one blue-pencil or red-pencil session.
- Also check out workshops or seminars given by potential editors. Attend and get a sense of how this editor might work with you.
- There are many sites such as *FirstEditing.com* or *Reedsy.com* that have editors (and other publishing professionals) on staff. Some of these companies are very reputable, but others are actually assisted self-publishing publishers who are trying to sell a "package." While some self-publishing companies are also reputable, others (referred to as "vanity presses") can be total scams. Their costs can be very high with low-quality help and products, and chances are you won't get to choose the editor you want. So do your research to find a quality site with experienced, vetted editors.

- Search *LinkedIn.com*. Not only does this site include resumes of editors; the users' groups are a good place to get reviews from other writers who have used editors, or to chat with editors and ask questions.
- *Writers' Digest Magazine* lists new editors in each edition and also provides many useful articles on finding and working with editors. Other writing magazines also provide helpful information. Sign up for the *Writers' Digest* email newsletter and you'll get updates on editors as well.
- *Media Bistro* is a website that offers resources for media professionals, including those in the publishing industry. Editors (and writers) looking for work can post there.
- *Fiverr* is another website where editors looking for work can post their information. The costs tend to be low, often because the people who post there are just starting out, or they may live in countries with a lower cost of living and therefore can offer lower rates. Unfortunately, sometimes English is their second language, and their editing quality might not be up to the level you'd like.
- What are your editing goals? Think about what editor and/or what levels of editing you need in terms of the outcomes you want to achieve with your book or other writing. For example.
 - Is it important that the text will draw the reader in so that person will want to keep turning the pages, want to read every page, and not miss anything?
 - Or are you writing the kind of book that readers will dip into here and there for specific kinds of information on a topic?
 - Does your story take place in a particular historical period, is it a particular genre, or does it include technology or other aspects that the editor needs to be familiar with?
 - What kind of publishing are you aiming for, and does the editor you have in mind have knowledge of the requirements?
 - Are you an experienced, and maybe even an already published writer who just needs very specific kinds of editorial help, or are you a new writer who probably has a lot to learn and needs multi-level editing help?

Search for detailed information about particular editors:

Check out editors' personal websites and their *Facebook* and other social media pages, as well as information about them on editors' associations such as *Editors Canada* or the *American Editorial Freelancers Association* which offer courses and accreditation for editors. Things to look for:

- Find out if they've been involved in publishing or other writing-related industry
- Look at books or other written materials they have already edited.
- Check their educational qualifications, including specific editing courses they have taken.

- Find out their career path, as well as their activities and hobbies that could be related to your manuscript (writing teacher, workshop leader, writer, critique group leader, a career or hobby related to the topic you're writing about, their favourite books to read, and so on).
- What are the editor's major editing accomplishments?
- Has the editor worked on manuscripts that a traditional publisher has accepted, and/or on manuscripts that have been self-published? Does this line up with your needs?
- Does the editor have a unique process that might work well for you (or not)?
- Editing specialties: Ask potential editors about their editing specialties and compare those with your needs. If the editor also writes, ask in what genres and for what kinds of publications—fiction or non-fiction books, magazines, corporate or organizational newsletters, websites, anthologies, poetry collections, media releases, marketing copy, and so on. If possible, read some of the editor's writing that is related to what you are writing.

Consultation meeting:

Arrange a consultation session with a potential editor. When talking to potential editors, make sure you've very clear to them about your purpose, vision, and goals for your book or other writing. This will be very helpful in building a solid writer-editor relationship. Also ask them questions that will help you decide whether this is the editor for you, such as:

- what kinds of books they have edited and how many.
- what editing level(s) they prefer to work on.
- what their editing and writing background is—education, career, etc.
- what they consider their major editing accomplishments.
- what is unique about their editing process.
- whether they provide a sample edit and a contract.
- what they think would make them a good fit for your project.
- types of books they enjoy working with—forms and genres.
- books they've edited, especially recently, that are similar to your own book's genre or subject.
- projects they've had difficulty with or would prefer not to do again, and why.
- what style manuals and reference guides they have experience using.
- if they've worked with publishers and/or agents.
- if they've worked with writers who have successfully followed your publishing path of choice (traditional, self- or hybrid publishing).
- whether the editor can provide guidance related to publishing processes or other things you wonder about.
- how well books they've edited have succeeded (e.g. accepted by publishing companies; successful sales records; good reviews; etc.).

- if they only edit, or if they are also willing to provide writing guidance and tutoring/coaching.
- how they calculate an estimate of editing time and costs.

Get a sense of the editor's personality and approach, and how the two of you will get along. You can tell a lot during your consultation meeting, but you may also want to talk to other writers who have already worked with that editor. Some things to consider:

- Editors should be honest and firm, yet encouraging.
- They should keep their work with a client confidential.
- If you want the editor to teach you skills, do you sense the editor will be a good teacher?
- What other needs like this are important to you?

References from previous editing clients:

Here are some questions you can ask previous clients of an editor you are interested in.

- How do you feel about the quality of the editor's work?
- Did the editor do the level(s) of editing that was agreed upon?
- What did you like about the editor's process and what were you disappointed with?
- Did the editor communicate clearly and have a good working relationship with you?
- Did the editor have a positive and encouraging attitude yet was also honest about what needed to be worked on?
- Did you find it easy to learn from the editor?
- Did the editor meet the agreed-upon deadline, and if not, why?
- Was the final cost reasonable?
- Would you hire this editor again? Why or why not?
- Did you work with the editor locally, face to face, or at a distance electronically, and how did that work out?

Ask for a sample edit:

Now narrow down your list of potential editors to three or four who you think might be suitable and ask each one for a sample edit. Some editors will do a sample edit for free; others will charge a fee, but it is worthwhile to pay in order to feel certain that this is an editor you want to work with. The type of sample edit will depend on the level(s) of editing you are seeking. For example, a developmental or substantive sample edit might be in the format of a written assessment based on a few manuscript pages plus a synopsis of the rest of it; a sample copyedit might be actual copyediting of the first few pages of the manuscript.

When is it time to hire an editor?

- It's time to hire an editor when you believe your manuscript is as good as it can possibly be—after all your planning, writing and self-editing work, with lots of input from your writing team. Your manuscript is also as polished as you can make it in mechanical terms (grammar, spelling, etc.), so the editor can focus on the most important facets of editing.
- You've received all the help you can from free or low-cost resources and helpers. After having your editing team (alpha reader, critique group members, beta readers) read your manuscript, and you've addressed all the problems you can, then it is time to call on an editor to focus on problems you need more help with.
- First, learn as much as you can from free or low-cost resources (editing books and tools, workshops, etc.). Invest in your writing skills before you invest in professional editing.
- Figure out what level(s) of editing will give your manuscript the most impact, then find an editor who specializes in that level(s). Some editors will do multiple read-throughs, each time working on a different level; others specialize in one or two levels. If you need help with multiple levels, decide whether you want one editor who can do it all, or if you'd prefer different editors for different levels. An editor who can do multiple levels will provide continuity, while specialist editors will provide a variety of perspectives plus “fresh eyes” and objectivity for a particular level. Note that if you have unusual difficulty with a particular level, you and the editor may need to go through it more than once, with you self-editing between each editor's pass through the manuscript.
- If you are really stuck, and volunteer/low-cost help isn't meeting your needs, an editor may be what you need. Usually, editors help writers who already have a manuscript which they have self-edited as much as possible with the help of their self-editing team. But if you are feeling really stuck just getting started with your project planning, or you feel that your first draft is such a disaster that you don't know what to do next, hiring a developmental editor can get you on-track with your self-editing. Then you can work with your self-editing team until you've made the manuscript the best you can; finally, hire editing help to polish your work. Alternatively, if you are really in need of major help with your writing and/or editing, consider other professional options such as a writing coach, ghostwriter, or co-author, rather than going through the self-editing process and then hiring an editor.

Anything else I should keep in mind as I prepare to hire an editor?

- Pre-writing or pre-editing services: Some editors offer review services and/or mentoring services to steer a writer in the right direction before even creating the first draft or before formal editing.
- Even when you've hired an editor, you will still have to do a lot of self-editing. Your book or other manuscript is your baby, not the editor's. Whatever level of editor you work with, each editor will analyze your writing, point out issues you have, and may offer suggested fixes and/or explain to you how to deal with grammar and other technical issues. However,

an editor's job is NOT to spend countless hours fixing your work for you. You need to take the editor's suggestions and do the nitty-gritty work of improving your manuscript. If you really want someone to do all the writing and editing work for you, consider hiring a ghostwriter instead (though even ghostwriters expect you to provide major ideas and details, as well as research, etc.; then they take your material and write it well).

- Each editor has a personal process he or she prefers to follow. Don't forget to ask potential editors how they approach editing and what they expect from you. Some editors are very particular about using their preferred process, while others may be more flexible and try to work with a process you prefer. For example:
 - Some editors do the work in a single, intensive pass, then hand the manuscript over to you for you to continue self-editing. Once you've gone through the edits and made corrections and improvements following the editor's suggestions, you'll hand it back for at least one more pass by the editor, followed by more self-editing by you.
 - Other editors might make multiple passes through your manuscript and focus on one aspect of the work at a time, such as editing level by level, or focusing with each pass on a particular major issue you have. After each pass, you'll do more self-editing.
 - Still other editors might edit a chapter at a time and have you self-edit it (as well as apply what you've learned to the rest of the manuscript) before the editor works on the next chapter.

Plan well ahead and be aware of deadlines:

- Whatever editor you decide to hire, start searching for an editor well ahead of when you think you'll be ready for professional editing. Good editors usually have several clients lined up and may not be able to slot you in for quite some time.
- Once you've decided on an editor and have started together on the editing process, remember that the editor's deadlines are just as important as yours. You expect the editor to finish his or her part of the editing process in the time schedule as promised—and you need to do that, too. If you get behind and miss an agreed-upon deadline, don't expect the editor to drop everything and squeeze you in among other clients. Some editors will occasionally do “rush jobs” but they often add a surcharge of as much as 35 to 50 per cent above their usual rate, as they'll have to work “overtime” hours and/or on their weekends or holidays.
- There are a lot of writers who'd like to get their book published in time for the “Christmas gift season” or other particular times of year suited to the work. If you have that kind of deadline in mind, find an editor well ahead of time, several months if possible, so the editor can fit you in on time for your publishing date goal.
- If you plan to seek traditional publishing, you'll also need to remember that even once a publisher has accepted your work—if it even does get accepted—it can take up to two years or maybe even longer until the actual publishing date. If the publishing company you

are interested in requires you to submit through an agent, you also need to allow a considerable amount of time to find one who will work with you (and realize that even then, your publisher of choice may not accept you). If self-publishing, you also must keep in mind the schedules of any designers, printers, and other publishing pros you hire, or the schedule of an assisted self-publishing company if you decide to take that route.

Other tips:

- Realize that if your writing needs a lot of editorial help, you may need to hire more than one editor, starting with a “big-picture” editor and working down through the other levels to a copy editor. (Some editors will do multiple levels; you will still need to pay for each pass). Or you may be better off to hire a writing coach or even a ghostwriter or co-author.
- If your topic is highly technical or specialized, unless you personally are an expert in that subject, you should hire a subject-specialist editor to go through the manuscript (or at least through the parts that contain technical information) before you hire an editor.
- Normally, you should hire a different proofreading specialist for the final check of the manuscript (when it is ready for printing) rather than your original editor(s) as you really need a fresh pair of eyes and proofreading expertise to catch those last few text and design issues that may remain. If you really want your editor to do the final proofread, allow a good period (say a month or so) after the editing so the editor can come to it with a fresh perspective.

How can you afford an editor and other costs of writing a book?

- Create a detailed business plan and budget to determine what all your expenses will be, and also your sources of income to cover those expenses.
- As you go through the writing and self-editing process, start saving towards costs of editing (and designing and printing, or hiring an assisted publishing company, if you will be self-publishing) that will come later.
- Simplify your life, decreasing your current expenses so you can funnel that money into your writing project.
- Earn extra money from other writing-related activities (freelance writing, speaking engagements, consulting, tutoring, etc.), and put that income toward your writing expenses.
- You might be able to borrow money from friends or family, but if you are considering this, you need to be reasonably certain that you can pay them back in an agreed-upon time period. You don’t want to ruin important relationships.
- Consider trying traditional publishing. If you get accepted, you may be able to get an advance, though they are not as large—or as available—as they were in the past. Remember, if a “publisher” requires you to pay for some of the publishing process, that is not a traditional publisher, but is a hybrid or assisted self-publishing company, or even a

vanity press (there are an incredible number of the latter, and many of them are total scams). Be incredibly careful and do in-depth research if you want to seek a traditional publisher or if you want to use an assisted-publishing company.

- You might be able to use crowdfunding, such as through Kickstarter, Indiegogo, Unbound, Patreon, or Pubslush. Do an online search for crowdfunding sites and focus on those who best meet your needs. And, of course, check out independent reviews.

Don't forget to place this exercise in your binder or Duotang.

And now go on to part 3 in this series: [Specialized Help Some Editors May Offer](#)