

TIME FOR AN EDITOR

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4. What Does Professional Editing Cost?

It is difficult to predict, without a sample edit, what an editing job will cost. There are many reasons for differing costs of editing jobs. But by knowing these reasons, you can at least develop a general idea of what costs you might be facing.

Editors have different ways of charging for their work:

Some editors—who are often beginners—charge a flat rate by the word or the page (which may mean a writer with an already well-written and self-edited manuscript may pay the same as another writer with a poorly written manuscript of the same length, though for the editor, a variety of manuscripts will tend to balance out in the end, income-wise). They may also charge a flat rate for an entire manuscript or on a total word count for the manuscript. While some of these approaches may result in decent editing jobs, writers should check out information on the editor carefully and, as with all editing offers, check examples of the editor's work if possible.

More experienced editors may also charge by the word (or page) on a sliding scale, depending on how much work the editor needs to do—based on a sample edit of a few pages, or a synopsis plus about 1000 words. Prices will range depending on the initial quality of the writing, ranging from very good (needing basically a copy edit) to writing that requires developmental, substantive or structural, and deep content editing, along with a lot of coaching to improve writing skills.

Some editors charge by the hour and give an estimate based on the time required to do the sample edit. Again, as with charges by the word on a sliding scale, the resulting estimate will depend upon the type of editing required.

The method of editing will also affect the cost. Some editors will read through and edit the full manuscript, then send it to the writer, who then does revisions. If the writer returns the project for more revisions, there will often be an additional cost; on the other hand, the estimated cost may include two or three passes through the entire manuscript. Other editors will edit by chapter or section, returning each part to the writer for revisions before carrying on. The cost will be higher than a once-through but will reflect multiple passes and a collaborative and

interactive approach, as well as the opportunity for the writer to improve his or her writing skills by practicing and applying each new skill gained along the way to the rest of the manuscript.

There are also editors who charge a flat fee for a full project or package; this project-based approach is more likely for work done for companies or organizations, rather than for individual writers.

Occasionally, an editor and a writer will together come up with a rate based on the value and outcomes of the work, based on the client's goals and the impact of the editor's work. This method views the cost of editing as a long-term investment for the writer's career, rather than a simple writing expense.

Reasons for variations or changes in editing costs:

- If extra editing is required (for example, if the writer decides to add an extra chapter, or if the chapter on which the sample edit is based turns out to be written much better than the rest of the manuscript, or if the editor ends up needing to do multiple passes/drafts in a manuscript needing a lot of work), the author must pay for extra editing time on top of the original time and cost estimate.
- The editor's location may cause variations in costs. Editing is the editor's career, and it pays their bills, after all. Different locations may have different costs of living, so the editor may have to charge more or less depending on how much income they require.
- Editors are skilled professionals, often with years of experience and education. It is only fair that authors take these aspects into account, just as for other professionals.
- Editors are business owners. They have to pay for the following.
 - editing equipment (computer, printer, etc.).
 - office space, whether leased or in a home office.
 - editing resources such as a variety of costly style guides which the editor needs to update with the latest editions.
 - professional development, as they keep on learning their trade and networking with writers and other writing-related professionals through conferences, workshops, etc.
 - purchasing and reading books about writing, as well as spending many hours reading in the genre(s) of their clients to better understand the genre(s).
 - bookkeeping and tax-time expenses (or taking courses to learn to do this themselves), payment for licenses and insurance, phone and internet bills related to the editing, and more.
- Editing includes much time and effort writers might not suspect, including the following.
 - the time the editor works directly on your manuscript.

- time spent communicating with clients via email or phone.
 - writing extra commentary after doing the sample edit (which the editor may have provided free of charge to you, but which has taken up the editor's valuable time).
 - writing comments and suggestions for rewriting or improving parts of the manuscript.
 - providing guidance or teaching skills to the writer.
 - doing research such as fact-checking the writer's work.
 - looking up fine points of grammar in a style guide.
 - setting up a schedule for your job, creating a contract, and so on.
- Some editors add an "administration fee" such as an extra 5% or 10% of the editing cost, while others may keep track of admin time and add it to their hourly rate. Some editors even kindly provide admin time as a free service—but keep in mind that "time is money" and workers deserve to be paid for their work.
 - The complexity of a project may affect editing costs. More complex projects may involve a higher rate because of the expertise and extra skills required.
 - Turnaround time can affect the cost. If a client wants a rush job done, and the editor already has a full schedule, the editor may be able to squeeze the edit in during weekends or by replacing a planned activity. But this is actually demanding the editor to do overtime work, and the client should expect to pay overtime wages, just as with any other work.

An editor's experience may affect the cost, especially if an hourly wage is charged. An experienced editor can usually work faster than a beginning editor, and so may charge a higher hourly wage, but in the end the total cost will most likely be similar as the beginning editor will take longer. Also, keep in mind that an experienced, highly educated editor will almost certainly do a higher quality job which will make their higher rate worthwhile.

When do writers need to pay for editing?

Some editors only ask for payment at the end of the job, and in that case, usually have a limit of a couple of weeks to a month for payment. Other editors will require a down-payment before editing, then ongoing payments part way through (for example, after 1/4, 1/2 and 3/4 of the work is completed), and a final payment at the end. They are not being unfair by requiring this—unfortunately, many editors have experienced writers who were very late making payments, didn't pay at all, or pulled out of an editing job part way through and wouldn't pay for work already done. Some writers prefer to send in their work chapter by chapter, doing self-editing after each chapter, both on that chapter, and on other chapters from what they've learned from the editing. Here, they may pay by the chapter.

How can a writer reduce editing costs?

- Understand the editing levels and the needs of your manuscript from the start, so you hire the right kind of editor.
- Research editors and find one with the appropriate skills and experience needed for your manuscript.
- Source an editor several months ahead so you don't need to pay "rush job" costs.
- Know your needs and your budget, and keep both in mind when choosing an editor and deciding how much editing you actually need.
- Make good use of your self-editing team and your own self-editing skills so that by the time you're ready for an editor, your manuscript is as good as you can make it, which will result in needing less editing. At the same time, you'll have improved your own writing skills, which will serve you well in future writing endeavours.
- Get sample edits from 3 or 4 editors and compare their costs, keeping in mind reasons for different costs. The cost of a sample edit might save you a lot more in the end.
- If you can't afford an in-depth edit, hire an editor to do a read-through and provide you with a critique report or manuscript evaluation; then do lots of study and self-editing based on the editor's recommendations.
- Learn to use self-editing tools efficiently, such as grammar and spell check software.
- Create a style sheet as you write and self-edit, so your writing style choices are consistent and your choices are clear to the editor.
- Depending on the type of writing you are doing, and/or your writing skills, you may not actually need an editor.

Budgeting for your editing and other writing expenses:

Plan well ahead when considering your editing and publishing budget. Start setting aside some money from each pay cheque into a special account for your upcoming costs of editing (plus design work and printing costs if you will self-publish), and for your marketing costs.

Especially if you plan to self-publish, learn as many of these skills as you can, or create a co-op with other writers who have different writing, editing, and publishing skills, and work together, bartering skills with each other.

An editor may be willing to set up a payment plan so the writer can spread the cost out over a longer time period. While it doesn't hurt to ask about this, the writer should check it out before the editing, not during or after editing.

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

And now go on to part 5 in this series: The Author-Editor Relationship