

# TIME FOR AN EDITOR

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## 5. The Author-Editor Relationship

Editing can be a costly and time-consuming part of your writing project, so you will want to make sure you will get along well with your editor. Here are some things to keep in mind:

Mutual respect and understanding is crucial right from the start, if you want a positive, beneficial relationship and editing result. Both writer and editor need to be respectful toward each other. The editor really does want to make the book (or other manuscript) better. The writer probably loves what he or she has written and is emotionally attached to it. Both writer and editor need to keep in mind each other's purposes and desires. If something comes up that makes one or the other upset, don't react immediately. Take a day or two to think through how to handle the issue, as time provides perspective. Also remember that, just as in any relationship, seemingly simple things like language used in discussions, and assumptions made that seem perfectly reasonable, might unexpectedly offend the other person in a surprising way. Be patient with each other.

### **Meeting and planning with your editor:**

- Expectations: You and your editor need to discuss at the beginning about your expectations for the editing process and results. Here are some tips.
  - You, the writer, need to be clear with the editor about your editing goals. Be honest and straightforward, so the editor can meet your needs.
  - Ask the editor for clarification about anything, like terminology or the editing process, which you don't clearly understand.
  - Poor punctuation, grammar, spelling, and other basics are distracting to an editor and may result in an inferior edit—or a much more expensive edit. An editor can only work with the material presented. An editor is not a miracle worker or a re-writer (though there are ghostwriters and co-authors who will do that kind of work). Before hiring an editor, seek help from other writers and readers (the “self-editing team”), use editing software tools, and take time to study writing. Then self-edit (with the help of your team) the piece of writing to the best of your ability. Unless you are an experienced and very accurate writer, the manuscript should probably not go to an editor until you complete at least 3 self-editing drafts. Then the editor can help the

writer deal with the more difficult substantive and stylistic issues instead of being bogged down by minor issues.

- Preparing for your meeting: Your editor can help you clarify your needs by providing you, before editing starts, with a form to be filled out which can help the editor understand your needs. If the editor doesn't have such a form, read over the following list, and prepare to provide this information to the editor when you have your initial discussion.
  - Your genre(s) and/or subject area.
  - Other books (articles, short stories, poetry, etc.) you have read that are similar to what you are currently writing.
  - Courses or workshops you have taken or books you have read about editing and self-editing. And any questions you have about the editing process.
  - How many words your piece has at this point. Also, your goal, if known, for the length of your piece.
  - Your purpose in writing this piece.
  - Your target audience. Clearly describe your ideal readers.
  - The style guide you are using for this document.
  - If you have created a personal style sheet. (If not, your editor may provide a blank form for you to list the stylistic choices you prefer).
  - Your goal for this editing job.
  - The level(s) of editing you are hoping for.
  - Your budget for editing. Your deadline for editing to be completed. How long you think it might take. (After a sample edit, your editor may provide you with a more realistic outlook on deadlines).
  - How much self-editing you have already done, along with help you have had from a critique/feedback group, an alpha reader and/or beta readers, or other helpers.
  - Whether you feel that the manuscript, at this point, is the best you can make it without professional editing help.
  - Platform building you have been doing to prepare for marketing your piece. How many followers you have on your blog, social media platforms, etc. And your marketing plans.
  - When you hope to publish this piece.
  - How much self-editing work you expect to do during the editing process. (The editing process is not just the editor going through and fixing your mistakes. You'll be doing lots more self-editing as part of the process).
  - Your publishing plans. For an article or story, will it be published in a magazine or other media? For a book, do you want to seek a traditional publisher (and possibly an agent) or do you want to self-publish or do hybrid publishing with a self-publishing company? State if you have already written (or if you are planning to do so) a

synopsis or summary, query, blurb, elevator pitch or other similar documents related to your piece.

Your answers to these questions (or your inability to answer certain questions) will help both you and the editor prepare for a useful discussion about the potential editing process, as well as the next steps to be taken if the manuscript is not ready for editing.

- **Next steps:** At the end of the initial writer-editor meeting, if you are both in agreement to move forward, the editor will probably ask you to submit a representative sample of writing from your manuscript for a sample edit. The sample edit can provide a more precise understanding of what level(s) and how many drafts of editing are needed, and the editor can estimate time and costs. If you both are then in agreement to continue the editing process, a written contract will clearly lay out all the expectations for the rest of the editing process.
- **Time considerations:** Patience is definitely a virtue in the editing process. Both editor and writer need to have a serious discussion about the writer's preferred timeline and the editor's availability. Writing, editing, and publishing a quality book is a long process. Quality editing frequently requires multiple edits (passes, drafts), with self-editing between each editing round. Different levels of editing, and possibly more than one editor, depending on what needs to be done, may be necessary.

### **Writing is a process:**

Writers need to be aware of the whole writing, self-editing, editing, publishing, and marketing process. These steps need to be understood and prepared for. To review:

- Plan the book (or other manuscript).
- Write the first draft, then self-edit that draft.
- Seek help from editing team members.
- More self-editing (multiple drafts).
- Find and work with an editor(s), including more self-editing through that process.
- Do marketing preparation work all along the way.
- If you desire traditional publishing, then there will be a search for an agent and/or publisher, which includes preparing queries, proposals, and/or other required documents.
- If you prefer self-publishing, then designers, printers, and other publishing-related people will need to be hired (unless you, as the writer, have these skills), as well as a proofreader right before printing.
- If you choose hybrid self-publishing, you (as writer) will need to research carefully to find a reputable assisted-publishing company to carry out their agreed-upon parts of the process.

- Marketing will continue right through the entire process, as well as after the book is published.

### **What are the editor's responsibilities?**

Some editors will help the writer with parts of the process besides the editing itself, but other editors don't do that. Some editors do multiple levels of editing; others specialize in one or two levels. You, the writer, must find out what an editor is willing/able to do, so the editing relationship is clear and there are no surprises. This is an important upfront discussion between editor and writer. If the editor cannot do everything you need, you may need to choose another editor or hire others who can fill gaps in your needs.

### **What are a writer's responsibilities?**

Writers should have a fairly clear understanding of what good writing entails. This includes not just simple issues like spelling, punctuation, and capitalization, but mid-level issues like sentence and paragraph structure and good grammar, as well as big picture issues like point of view, cause and effect, organization and structure, plot holes, characterization, and more. If you as a writer do not have a good solid understanding of the basics of good writing, you may be shocked when the editor points out that your manuscript may need major changes—such as a lot more self-editing and help from a self-editing team, or hiring editors who specialize in certain editing levels, starting with the big-picture issues and moving down to the small issues.

If you decide, halfway through an edit, to change the story-line or even make simple changes such as the physical looks of a character, such changes can create a ripple-effect through the entire manuscript, leading to hours of searching and making needed changes. The same applies if the editor discovers inconsistencies or plot holes in the initial stage of editing. And remember, the manuscript should have already been thoroughly self-edited, with the help of several self-editing team members, before formal editing begins, to avoid as many of these problems as possible.

### **Respect each other's vision and goals:**

The editor should ask, "How can I help you bring your manuscript to the point you dream of?" At the same time, you, the writer, should ask the editor, "What will be the outcome of the editorial changes you are suggesting? How will they help me reach my vision and goals?" Meshing your editor's suggestions with your own style, vision, tone, and goals is important. Both writer and editor should strive together for balance.

**Be prepared emotionally:**

A writer should not be offended when an editor explains that a lot of work needs to be done. Your editor is actually helping you improve your writing, while also thinking about the needs of the publisher and the potential readers who might buy the book. To work well together, writers need to go in with an attitude of willingness to learn a lot about writing and being willing to work hard on their self-editing.

Editors need to be honest about what kind of editing needs to be done and yet encouraging at the same time. They need to remember that writers have invested a lot of themselves in a writing project and may need kind reassurance along with constructive critiquing.

**Expect to self-edit again and again:**

And again! If you, the writer, have high hopes and expectations for the success of your manuscript, you must accept that some sentences, paragraphs, and even whole sections, (or perhaps all the manuscript) will need to be revised many times until it is as well done as you, the author, with help from your self-editing team and your editor, can make it. Even if your manuscript then gets accepted by a traditional publisher, there are almost always more revisions to come, as the publisher's vision and needs for the book also have to be considered.

**Record keeping:**

It is important that both editor and writer keep a written record of all interactions. Save each newly edited file and create a new copy on which to continue self-editing; then save that file and create yet another new file for more editing. You both should save all emails related to the editing job, in case questions come up about the process so far. If there are oral discussions (in person, or by phone or video call), each of you should take notes and then compare them to be sure there are no misunderstandings. With a strong paper trail in place, if misunderstandings occur, there's a good chance you can resolve them easily by reference to the written notes.

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

And now go on to part 6 in this series: Important Notes to Editors (and Writers, Too)