

TIME FOR AN EDITOR

By Norma J Hill (aka Pen and Paper Mama)

© 2021

10. Some Editing and Publishing Red-Flag Issues

Warning: not all editors are equal:

Besides the level(s) of editing that editors do, there can be a vast range of training, experience, and expertise in different genres and types of writing. Look for editors who can provide evidence of their qualifications and strong, reputable reviews. Self-edit, then work with your critique team, learn and develop your writing skills, do more self-editing, and then find an editor who can really help you with specific things you still need to improve on so your work will truly shine.

There are some inexperienced and/or untrained editors—and some outright frauds as well (though there are also some beginner editors who do a good job). So do your research. Following are some red flag issues related to editing and publishing. Keep in mind that professional editing is not a prerequisite for publication, but having a polished manuscript is. If you don't want to work with a freelance editor, you'll need a lot of help from your team (which should then include experienced, published writers), and you'll need to do a great deal of top-quality self-editing.

Publisher/agent-editor kickback schemes:

Occasionally, publishers or agents (usually ones that don't seem to have strong reviews or reputations) may make referrals to particular editors (usually also ones that don't seem to have strong reviews or reputations), and some kind of kick-back scheme may be involved.

When a traditional publisher is not:

Sometimes a publisher will claim to be a traditional publisher—but will then charge you for editing and critiques and a lot of other “services.” This is dishonest, as a traditional publisher will never charge you. Any kind of dishonest representation like this is a huge red flag. Reputable assisted-publishing or hybrid publishers will be honest and forthright about their charges.

When editors promise guarantees:

When an editor says they can guarantee a traditional publisher will accept your work, there are no such guarantees. Even if a freelance editor also works on contract for a publishing company, that doesn't mean their editing will get you in the door.

Hybrid publishers are not traditional publishers.

Watch out for representatives of hybrid publishers who tell you, "Oh yes, we're a real, traditional publisher. After all, we are owned by XYZ traditional publishing company." Some traditional publishers have assisted publishing/hybrid branches, but those branches should be honest about what kind of publishing they actually offer. If you have to pay, that is not a traditional publisher.

Is an assisted-publishing company editor okay instead of a freelance editor?

There are reputable assisted-publishing companies that have good editors, and you might consider going that route directly rather than with a freelance editor first—but if so, check out a lot of objective, independent reviews (not so-called reviews by the company), and realize that if your goal is traditional publishing, assisted or hybrid self-publishing is not the same thing, and you won't be able to claim to be traditionally published.

If editing or assessment by a particular editor is a requirement from an agent to represent you or from a publisher to accept your submission, this is a conflict of interest, and may also be a scheme to increase the agent's or company's profit margin by charging you for extra services, which may or may not be of professional quality. Research carefully—or just run—if any of these "services" or "great deals" are offered to you.

Extravagant praise:

If an editor—or an assisted-publishing company or an agent—offers extravagant praise or promises, such as saying your book will definitely be a bestseller and will make you big bucks, or if they promise to do all the marketing work, or if they say that by hiring them you will be guaranteed to have your book accepted by a traditional publisher, beware! None of these are promises that can be guaranteed, and a quality editor or assessor or assisted-publishing company will not make such claims. Even if they seem legitimate, examine the small print of any contract extremely carefully, and if you are suspicious in the slightest, check with very experienced writers and/or a lawyer who specializes in publishing.

If an editor offers one-size-fits-all editing and accepts all comers:

Again, beware. Expert editors and assessors almost all have areas of specialization. It's highly unlikely a single editor can edit all subjects and genres equally effectively. Excellent editors turn down editing projects when they know they can't do a high-quality job. Editors who claim they can "do it all" may be new editors trying to build a quick clientele, or they may simply not be qualified editors as they obviously don't understand the complexities of editing.

Poor understanding of editing levels or no sample edit/assessment:

If an editor does not seem to understand clearly the different editing levels, and/or willingly takes on a low-level editing job (such as copyediting or even proofreading) without doing a sample edit and/or without doing an overall assessment or seeking proof that higher-level editing has already been completed, it's a sign that the editor lacks professional knowledge and/or experience.

If an editor's rates seem unusually low compared to other editors offering similar services, or if the editor does not have a strong portfolio, he or she "might" be a beginner. This doesn't necessarily mean that the editor does not have training, but he or she may lack experience. Still, a low-cost or inexperienced but trained editor might well do a good job. Offering low rates may be an honest admittance that, due to lack of experience, the editor will take longer to do the job than an experienced editor. Or an editor might offer lower rates to seniors or others on limited income as a professional courtesy to the writing community. Some editors live in a location where their cost of living is relatively low, or editing may not be their only source of income, so they can offer lower rates. On the other hand, a few editors have undercut the rates of other editors to try to get more work—but if that is the way they get work, it could be a red flag in relation to their ability as an editor. It may also show a lack of professionalism in relation to their editing peers. So, take these issues into consideration and do a little extra research just to be sure.

Professional freelance editors will not normally cold-call writers (nor should publishers of any type—publisher cold-calls are a definite red flag unless a writer already has a firm reputation as a writer or is a reputable expert in a particular area). Writers find editors through their websites and blogs; through advertising in industry journals or on social media; through editor presentations at writers' conferences or workshops; by word-of-mouth from satisfied writers; and by other legitimate means.

Refusal by an editor to provide reasonable requests for a resume, references, work samples, or sample edits are all possible red flags.

If an editor won't give you a well-reasoned price estimate or won't specify what a contract type fee will cover, move on.

Unidentified editors:

Editorial services which won't identify or let writers choose the editor they'll be working with should cause writers to be cautious—what is the company hiding? (But if you are working with a traditional publishing house, they will choose the editor(s) who they want to work with you—remember, they are paying the bills and taking the financial risk).

Unclear business arrangements:

When editorial services or self-publishing companies don't have clear business arrangements, beware. Writers should be told upfront exactly what they include in what you are paying for. There should be NO continuing demands for more money for additional services. Also, be wary of marketing and distribution promises. Most self-publishing companies do not have access to distribution that traditional publishers can offer, and all publishing companies expect you, the writer, to do a majority of marketing before, during, and after publishing.

Be wary of agents who charge fees.

Legitimate agents get paid by the publishers they work with, as a percentage (generally 15%) of the income from a writer's book sales. They do not get paid directly by writers.

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

And now go on to part 11 in this series: *If You're Unhappy With Your Editor's Work*