

TIME FOR AN EDITOR

By Norma J Hill (aka Pen and Paper Mama)

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9. Writing Coaches, Ghost Writers, and Co-Authors

Does the self-editing process sound too complicated for you? Would you rather, from the start of the writing and editing process (or wherever you are in the process right now, such as finding yourself running into a block or at least feeling frustrated and overwhelmed) hire a professional writing coach to guide you through your writing and self-editing, step-by-step over a period of time? Actually, there are people who do that!

Writing Coaches:

Most writing coaches are experienced writers and/or editors who enjoy sharing their knowledge and encouragement. Writers can find these coaches on-line through their personal websites, by referral from writers who've used their services in the past, or writers may meet writing coaches and observe their skills at workshops or conferences where they sit on panels, lead workshops, and offer pitch sessions or blue- or red-letter sessions. Some coaches also work on contract for a company that provides writing services or may be part of a co-op of freelance coaches, editors, and other writing and publishing professionals. Coaching arrangements are often long term and focus on the full writing and editing process, but may also be shorter term, focusing on a writer's particular need(s) at a certain level in the writing and editing process.

So, what do writing coaches do for writers?

Just as editors will usually offer potential clients a sample edit and meet together to discuss the possibilities of a writer-editor relationship, writing coaches usually start with a free information session about their services. They can create a personalized coaching proposal, including time commitments and cost estimates, similar to the contract editors draw up with a client. Coaches thus become an accountability partner as well, keeping writers on schedule to reach their writing and publishing goals.

Writers can share their struggles with writing and self-editing, and get a feel for the coach's services, such as if a coach can give objective, honest advice and critiquing, along with encouragement, motivation, and support. They can also ask to see a coach's body of work: written materials the coach has created, as well as examples of coached written work, testimonials, and referrals. Both writer and coach get a sense of whether they're a good fit, personality and energy-wise, for working together in a productive relationship over an extended time period.

Services a writing coach can offer a writer:

- *Analysis and coaching of writing and self-editing skills:* Frequently communicating with a writer, a coach will ask questions, analyze the writer's ongoing efforts, make suggestions, and teach writing skills and self-editing skills which move the process forward at a steady yet comfortable rate for the writer. In this way, the writer will learn to think and act like a successful author while working through the writing and self-editing process. The coach will help the writer break through creative and other blocks, such as procrastination and lack of organizational skills. The coach will also help the writer analyze personal reasons for writing and use that understanding to develop a project with more clarity.
- *Specialization in writing formats and genres:* Like editors, most coaches specialize to some degree. They may help with fiction, nonfiction, short stories, essays, articles, poetry, memoir, narrative nonfiction, self-help writing, or particular fiction genres. They may also suggest options such as article writing, website/blog development, podcasts, short vs. long-form writing, formats such as workbooks or video presentations, and more.
- *Writing and editing levels and processes:* The coach can help the writer understand the writing and self-editing process as they work through the stages one by one. If the writer has not yet started writing, but has a general idea of the preferred kind of writing, the coach can help the writer develop ideas and structure the project before actually writing, by brainstorming with free-writing and webs, outlining, creating a project plan, and researching. The coach can help the writer define and clarify the project's purpose, target audience, theme, short- and long-term goals and priorities, and schedule deadlines. Then the writer can write, following the planned outline structure. The coach will continue to help the author complete the project with customized guidance and feedback.
- *Help a writer successfully self-edit their manuscript:* If a writer has already written the first draft of a manuscript, the coach can first help the writer decide if the book is a likely candidate for publishing or not. If it is, the coach, like an editor, can help the writer work through the self-editing and editing stages of structural, stylistic, and copy editing to improve the initial draft to make it publishable. Through continued self-editing, the writer will continue to build writing skills. The coach will be experienced with writing and editing tools, including word processors like Microsoft Word (and perhaps also Scrivener, Google Docs, or Pages—though Word is the publishing industry standard); editing

software such as Grammarly, ProWritingAid, and other similar tools; and style manuals and other writing and editing guides. The coach can help the writer learn how to use these tools successfully. If the writer is struggling with particular writing skills, the coach can provide in-depth training and supply practice exercises. The coach can also help the writer develop a good writing and self-editing team.

- *Publishing and marketing decisions:* A coach will also discuss upcoming decisions and activities such as pre-and post-publishing marketing and the pros and cons of different kinds of publishing to pursue. The coach may provide guidance on preparing queries, synopses, proposals, and similar documents, which will keep the writer on track with the writing and prepare for submitting to agents and/or publishers. The coach may also help the author decide on marketing, promotion, and distribution options. A coach can encourage the writer to start, from the early stages of the coaching process, marketing activities such as platform building by developing a following of potential readers. Coaches may help a writer develop a basic website and social media accounts or refer the writer to professionals who specialize in these kinds of activities. Together, coach and author can create and put into action a long-term promotional plan.
- *Connections to other publishing professionals:* If necessary, the coach may encourage the writer to hire another editor who can provide fresh viewpoints and input about specific writing and editing issues before final self-editing and publishing. Most coaches have connections to publishing professionals, including editors, literary agents, ghostwriters, designers, and social media and other marketing experts.
- *Business coaching:* Some coaches specialize in helping non-fiction writers, speakers, and businesspeople to use their ideas and written materials to build their business credibility. This coach can help a businessperson create a book with an attractive presentation style which can attract ideal clients, and which the businessperson can hand out or sell at speaking opportunities or workshops.
- *Coaching specialty services:* Every coach has their own specialties and skills. Other services coaches might offer include the following.
 - Help a writer avoid costly mistakes related to aspects of the writing, editing, and publishing processes.
 - Provide consultation for specific writing or editing needs rather than a longer-term start-to-finish process.
 - Teach an author how to approach writing as a business.
 - Help a writer gain clarity about personal writing and publishing goals, then set short- and long-term goals and develop a plan to reach them.
 - Point a writer to relevant resources and materials.
 - Offer group seminars, teleseminars, podcasts, self-study courses, and workshops for writers, related to writing and publishing. These activities may include options such as highly personalized small-group workshops or lighter-touch larger group workshops.

- Create useful worksheets, checklists, handouts and guidebooks, podcasts, videos, and other tutorial materials that a writer can study.
- Help writers build their writing and self-editing team.
- Help writers build their “tribe” of reading followers and fans.
- Help writers gain self-confidence and realize their potential.
- Provide life coaching on issues relating to writing success, such as developing a writing space, fitting writing into a busy family or work schedule, improving time management skills and prioritizing, building physical and mental energy, or working with personal emotions.
- Help a writer develop related skills such as employment by a company and/or freelance/contract work, become a speaker and workshop leader, or even become an editor or coach.
- Instil discipline in writers, pushing them to be their best.
- Help writers develop habits that will make them a better writer and self-editor: daily writing; observational skills; read, listen, watch, and speak like a writer; choose a good writing location/space; set boundaries with family and friends; publish regularly; set goals and deadlines and be accountable to them; self-reward; develop a website, blog, social media, and email list; and do short- and long-term planning.
- Help writers develop business skills: write like it is one’s job/business; decide how much money and time to invest and choose best investments; learn basics of freelance writing (or employment writing); create a business plan; and develop bookkeeping and tax preparation skills.
- Help writers discover their core passions, values, beliefs and goals that distinguish them from other writers and make them uniquely interesting; help them develop a personal brand; and help them take a stand for what they believe in and step out to create change.
- Help writers figure out why they procrastinate—fear of disapproval, scheduling issues, fear of marketing, lack of responsibility or energy, lack of networking, boredom, busy life, emotional issues, doubts, anxiety, loneliness—and how to overcome those issues, make determined decisions, and become a focused writer.
- Suggest routines and rituals which may help a writer focus and get into the writing flow.

What does the coaching process look like?

To choose and hire a coach, work through this checklist.

- *To hire a coach*, assess what you as a writer want and need. Be honest about your current writing and editing skills and what you need to improve.

- *Look for a coach with a proven track record* as a writing coach and/or an editor, writer, and writing teacher. Check references from past clients.
- *Seek a coach who has worked with your genre, subject area, and/or writing format.* Find out what different coaches specialize in and choose a coach who is a good fit for your needs.
- *Consultation:* Meet with a potential coach you are interested in (even if you have to pay for the initial consultation), ask questions, and pay attention to whether the two of you have a good fit for personality and energy. As you describe your needs, and perhaps provide a sample of your writing, pay attention to the coach's response—if the coach provides objective advice and critiquing in an encouraging but firm way.
- *Coaching session planning:* The coach and writer will meet together, face-to-face, at the writer's or coach's home or office; or if they live in different locations, use on-line meeting tools such as Skype or Zoom video. They will probably meet biweekly or once a month, and the writer will continue to work steadily on the project between meetings.
- *During a coaching session:* During a session, the coach will usually teach skills to a writer in a hands-on workshopping style, presenting information or guidance, then have the writer put it into practice immediately. This could include skills like writing more creatively, tightening up a manuscript, focusing on the target audience's needs and expectations, or making writing smoother and more organized. It could also deal with specifics like a story arc, theme, creating tension through sentence structure, or working with specific grammar issues. The coach and writer will also go over the writing and/or self-editing done since the last session and discuss what is working and what isn't. They may talk about what is missing or what needs to be added and decide together what the writer needs to do before the next meeting.
- *Between coaching sessions:* Between meetings, the writer will work on the assigned work, and will email some of the completed work to the coach to look over and prepare for giving feedback and new assignments at the next meeting. If the writer runs into difficulties or has questions, the writer can contact the coach by email, and certain times may be set for short phone conversations, if needed.
- *Time management and self-motivation:* Many authors may have quite solid writing skills but have difficulty with time management and self-motivation. Working with a coach will help the writer create writing blocks, recording them on a calendar or in an agenda book. The coach can then check in from time to time between meetings to gently but firmly keep the writer following the plan, including setting and reaching realistic deadlines. Thus, a coach is also a mentor, offering encouragement, support, guidance, advice, and accountability. Over time, the coach will provide a sounding board, provide useful commentary on the writer's work, and guide the writer to reach his or her potential.

What does coaching cost, and how long does the coaching process take?

Coaching is not cheap; an average price often quoted is \$80 per one-hour session, though rates can vary and may be negotiable, depending on the expertise and experience of the coach, the writer's needs, how much contact and work the coach will do between sessions, and more. Usually, the writer makes payments at each session; since sessions may be biweekly or even just monthly, the cost can be budgeted for and spread over a period of time.

Differences between working with an editor or a coach:

While the editing process is usually focused on one or two levels at a time (though some editors may provide editing through all levels), a coach is more likely to guide and mentor a writer through multiple stages of both writing and editing, and even publishing. An editing job might take anywhere from a few focused days to a month or two; there will be some back-and-forth, with the writer working on self-edits based on the editor's suggestions either during the editing time or afterward. But with coaching, the coach and writer usually have a scheduled meeting plan (with email and/or phone interaction between as needed), and the process can take several months or even a year or two, depending on the parameters of the project. When working with an editor, the writer usually pays the full cost in close time proximity to the editing time, while with a coach, the writer may be able to spread out the cost by paying for one coaching session at a time.

Return on Investment (ROI):

Whether a writer works with a coach, an editor, a designer, or any other writing and publishing professional, it is important to think of not only the precise work that is done but also the long-term ROI, which may include developing stronger writing, self-editing, and publishing skills; producing a manuscript that has a much better chance of being successfully published; paying for skill development now that the writer can apply over and over to future writing projects; becoming a successful writer and business person; and so on. While a writer's own efforts and the help from the writer's team are useful and important, your coach (and/or other writing professionals) may move you to a career-style, professional level of writing and publishing.

What if an editor or coach really isn't what you need?

Perhaps you've decided you don't really want to deal with the direct editing help of a freelance editor, and the coaching process seems too long and drawn out. What if you have a great idea, but you really don't want to do the writing yourself, or can't for some reason? What then? Let's talk a bit about two other kinds of writing assistants: co-authors and ghostwriters.

Co-authors:

You might see yourself as a co-creative person who prefers teamwork, and what you'd really like is someone with whom you can create your dream writing project together. Well, a co-author might be just what you're looking for. Yet even in a co-author relationship, it is likely that each of you will have certain skills that you are particularly good at. So, while you might develop the characters and story line together, one of you might focus on dialogue or setting, while the other might focus on character development or knowledge of the genre's requirements. In the self-editing stage, one of you might focus on the big issues while the other might focus on copyediting and proofreading. That's fine, but make sure you discuss these things ahead of time. Partnerships can be great—but they can also end up with arguments and frustration if you haven't really talked over and even prepared a contract regarding what aspects each of you will do—including the time and effort each partner will contribute; and financial contributions (such as for editing or design work).

Ghostwriters:

Maybe you have a great idea for a book or other writing project, but because of other responsibilities in your life, or serious difficulties with writing, you really don't have time or energy to spend working on your writing skills and self-editing development. In that case, you might hire a ghostwriter who will take your ideas and turn them into a completed project with your name on the front cover. Ghostwriters usually cost a lot, even tens of thousands of dollars—but they are doing most of the writing and editing work while you get to claim authorship. That said, the ghostwriter will expect you to provide your purpose for the book (or other written piece), and details of what you want included. If you are a businessperson, you can continue to build your business and use that extra income to pay your ghostwriter. If the book is related to your business, it will in the end also help to build your business and income. Or, if writing is too difficult for you to do, or you lack time or energy, but your project has great meaning for you, the result may also be well worth the investment.

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

And now go on to part 10 in this series: Some Editing and Publishing Red-Flag Issues