Editing

Editing is a stage of the writingprocess in which a writer or editor strives to improve a draft by correcting errors and making words and sentences clearer, more precise, and as effective as possible. The process of editing involves adding, deleting, and rearranging words to cut the clutter and streamline overall structure.

THE ROLE AND SCOPE OF EDITING

Very few people can immediately write a lucid and well-expressed piece of work. In most cases, the final draft is smoothed and polished so that others can readily understand the writer's message. It is the editor's role to improve the quality of the writing, whether their own or someone else's work.

The scope of editing ranges from self-editing, where the writer examines their writing and improves it as best they can, to professional editing, where an expert is employed by a publishing company to improve the quality of a piece of writing prior to publication.

There are many other facets of commercial publishing that require the skills of professional editors. These include commissioning publications; reviewing manuscripts; overseeing manuscripts through the production process; liaising with writers, publishers, printers and agents; writing blurbs, captions and press releases; and researching and organising pictures. In smaller organisations the editor may also be responsible for the design and publication of documents, newsletters, reports, magazines and books using desktop publishing software and equipment.

Editing involves several stages, in summary, they are: 1. Reviewing the manuscript 2. Structural (substantive) editing 3.Copy editing 4.Proof reading 5.Checking proofs.

WHAT DOES AN EDITOR DO?

Every editing job is different in some respect from others, and different editors may be responsible for different tasks. In general, editors do any or all of the following (or may delegate some tasks to others):

- Correct language errors, such as poor grammar, incorrect spelling and punctuation, and ambiguities.
- Identify technical inaccuracies (eg. in a non-fiction book.)
- Improve conciseness and clarity, if and where this is of significance.
- Identify potential legal problems, such as plagiarism, ethical or moral problems, copyright infringements, defamation risks.
- Check for uniformity and appropriateness of content and style, and make or recommend adjustments if necessary.
- Determine whether the content of a manuscript should be deleted or replaced (usually with approval from both the author and publisher).
- Determine whether additional content is required within a manuscript (usually with approval from both the author and publisher).
- Determine the order in which the manuscript is to be published.
- Liaise with all other persons involved in the production of the publication.
- Check and clear copyright material to be used in the publication (for instance, anything which is not the original work of the author should be properly referenced and used only in accordance with the law in any jurisdiction relevant to the publication).

- Prepare preliminary pages and cover, and mark up any end matter, usually in collaboration with the author.
- Prepare instructions for others involved in production, such as the designer, illustrator, typesetter and printer.
- Select illustrations, including photographs, tables and drawings from material submitted by the author.
- Identify and source additional illustrations if required (from the author or elsewhere).
- Write marketing material if required (often in collaboration with the author and/or the marketing staff).
- Monitor (and sometimes control) production schedules.
- Check proofs at each stage of production.
- Maintain a record of corrections after production for use in any reprints or new edition.

THE TWO TYPES OF EDITING IN ACADEMIC WRITING

"There are two types of editing: the ongoing edit and the draft edit. Most of us edit as we write and write as we edit, and it's impossible to slice cleanly between the two. You're writing, you change a word in a sentence, write three sentences more, then back up a clause to change that semicolon to a dash; or you edit a sentence and a new idea suddenly spins out from a word change, so you write a new paragraph where until that moment nothing else was needed. That is the ongoing edit...

"For the draft edit, you stop writing, gather a number of pages together, read them, make notes on what works and doesn't, then rewrite. It is only in the draft edit that you gain a sense of the whole and view your work as a detached professional. It is the draft edit that makes us uneasy, and that arguably matters most."—From "The Artful Edit: The Practice of Editing Yourself" by Susan Bell.

EDITING SKILLS

A competent editor has the following skills: • Good computer skills • Excellent communication skills – both verbal and written • Good organisational skills • The ability to meet deadlines • A logical mind • An eye for detail • An understanding of the print production processes.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD EDITOR

The best editors are able to work according to the requirements of a job, changing the intensity and detail of their editing according to each different situation they are faced with. Editors should be impartial, objective and unhindered by prejudices. Good editors are not pedantic. They are pragmatic. Above all, a good editor is one who can improve communication with the readers.

EDITING TECHNIQUES FOR ACADEMIC WRITING

People sometimes assume that editing and proofreading are the same thing, but editing has a different function to proofreading and occurs at different stages in the writing process.

Editing involves a close reading and re-writing of this version. For example, you may improve expression by eliminating redundancies, tautologies, or repetition, or you may improve the structure of your argument by inserting linking sentences between paragraphs, transitional phrases, or sentences that conclude your main point. When you edit your work, you are aiming to improve the sense and logic of your material.

Proofreading takes place after the editing process, using the very last version of your text. When you proofread, you are looking for mistakes that may have escaped the editing process such as spelling, punctuation, capitalisation, and noun-verb agreement errors. You are not reading for sense, but for

mechanics. Once you have corrected these errors, you should have a clean, final copy ready for submission.

Structural-editing and copy-editing

There are two basic forms of editing: structural editing and copy-editing. Structural-editing involves checking your argument for structure, logic and sense. Copy-editing involves checking your written expression.

When editing for *purpose and logic* begin by checking the introduction; does it provide the reader with a 'map' for the body of your article? Does it provide all the necessary pieces of information expected in a journal article introduction such as aim, significance, argument, research question, contribution and findings? Does the body of the article achieve what is being promised in the introduction? Does the thread of your argument permeate the whole document? Now check the conclusion and determine whether or not it demonstrates how your argument has been proven.

When editing for *cohesion* begin by checking the links (or transition sentences) between paragraphs. Does the discussion flow logically? Do you have a topic sentence for each paragraph? Is your signposting language adequate to guide the reader? Review the workshop booklet relating to cohesion for more elements.

When editing for *repetition* check for information which is repetitive and can be deleted without confusing the reader.

When editing for *clarity and brevity* (conciseness) check sentence structure first to ensure all are clear and concise. Avoid long, run-on sentences that put a strain on the reader. Check for ambiguous or vague expressions. Look for redundancies, tautologies, empty phrases and pointless adjectives and adverbs.

When editing for *grammar* look for common errors including compound nouns, missing subjects or verbs in a sentence, plural-singular verb errors, check tense, pronoun agreement and the use of possessive apostrophes.

When editing for *jargon* look for overuse (and therefore probably unnecessary use) of complex terms. When key terms and concepts are used ensure you define them at the first point you introduce them to the reader.

DANGER SIGNS!

Editors can fall into behavioural patterns which simply do not enhance the quality of their work. The following should be watched for and avoided:

- Adhering to certain rules irrespective of whether or not they improve communication. For example, changing the word 'till' to 'until' throughout a document even though it really does not improve communication.
- Not matching the effort put into editing with the work being edited. It serves little purpose spending excessive time editing a piece of writing destined for a publication operating on a tight budget. It may be reasonable to edit fine points for an English grammar text book or a novel by a best-selling author but the additional effort and time may not be appropriate for a local sporting club newsletter.
- Pondering for a long time over a change that could be made in seconds. While some changes might require careful consideration, others are not so significant, and an editor can waste precious time deciding whether or not to make the change or deciding what kind of change to make. If the results either way are not significant, it is best to make a decision quickly rather than seek perfection.
- Continually cross-checking for consistency of minor points. If the editor cannot remember what came before, and the point is of no serious technical consequence, it is unlikely many of the readers will notice or worry about it. Consider whether it is really worth spending a lot of time and expense to achieve perfect consistency when a negligible number of readers (if any) will even notice that effort.
- Changing voice in order to achieve consistency: It is not very important to change voice (eg. passive to active voice or vice versa) to achieve consistency. More important reasons for changing voice are to reduce word count, improve clarity, or make a piece of writing more concise.
- Concentrating on unused space rather than used space in a layout. There is no reason to increase the number of words or lengths of sentences or paragraphs to avoid blank areas on a page (eg. at a chapter's end). Blank space can provide visual relief and variety. Every word should contribute value to the document.
- Checking page proofs repeatedly. Some editors don't recognise their own limitations. Making multiple checks of a manuscript will still not bring a fresh perspective to the task, and errors can still be overlooked. It is best to ask someone else to assist with checking.
- Failing to delegate Editors who think no one else can do tasks as well as they can may fail to incorporate and balance the contributions made by others involved in the publishing process – the writers, illustrators, publishers, and layout artists. Others can bring other skills and perspectives to a task, resulting in a better overall product.