NOTES FROM Sat. 3/11/2023 EDITING PRESENTATION BY JOHN BOLES

While there are various terms used for types of manuscript editing services, here are the four basic categories.

1. PROOFREADING - Proofreading can sometimes be confused with copy editing and line editing. But proofreading is a final comb through a manuscript before it goes to print. Proofreaders look for typos, formatting issues, grammatical mistakes, and other minutiae. Writers looking to self-publish will often spend money on proofreading to give their project a final once-over. Keep in mind, you shouldn't expect creative feedback with this type of service.

Manuscript formatting and fact checking are similar services. They involve formatting your manuscript, and checking the accuracy of your work, respectively. Ebook formatting providers and layout designers are in this category as well. These are just some of the services you can purchase piecemeal. While these services are very important, don't expect creative feedback.

2. COPY EDITING - Copy editing looks at the grammar and mechanics of your manuscript, while checking the project at the sentence level for spelling, style, punctuation, etc. Comments on the overall quality of the writing and writing voice are *usually included*, but not always—depending on the editor.

You'll need to discover up front how deeply your potential editor is willing to dive. Copy editing is one step up from proofreading in terms of thoroughness. If you're only looking for a service that focuses on the basics of your writing, without a lot of big-picture creative feedback, a copy edit is a good call.

3. LINE EDITING - Line editing involves all of the services provided at the copy editing level, and more. It works with grammar and mechanics, sure, but the feedback also includes comments on plot, character, story, writing voice, readability, and potentially even marketability.

Now, what does "readability" actually mean? First and foremost, obviously it refers to how easy the work is to read. Are some sentences too short and choppy so there's no natural flow to the reading experience? Are other sentences too long so they ramble and are difficult for a reader to immediately grasp the authors intended meaning?

ASK YOURSELF THIS: Have you ever read a book or short story where you read a sentence and have to go back and read it again a second or third time to understand what it means?

If so, that sentence is in need of editing. In fact, sometimes a series of sentences need rewriting, or even an entire paragraph.

As far as "marketability" is concerned, I've had writers send me work in a specific genre, but it turns out the story is actually a different genre from what the author intended.

Here's an example: I had one author hire me to edit what she labeled a "thriller." The problem was it was missing one of the requirements of the thriller genre. There was no chase scene. A thriller should contain at least one chase scene. It doesn't have to be a high-speed car chase or even a foot chase, but there must be a scene where someone is actively pursuing a character with potentially dire consequences.

Line editing also focuses on bigger issues of writing style, voice, and storytelling. Your overall level of writing craft is part of that conversation. If you want feedback on your writing basics, but are also looking for comments on what you've written and how to improve it, you will want to research freelance **line editing** services at minimum, instead of just purchasing **proofreading** or **copy editing**.

4. DEVELOPMENTAL EDITING

The most comprehensive and full-service critique you can buy is developmental editing. Investing in developmental editing means you'll receive everything coming to you in terms of copy editing and line editing but also deep feedback on your writing and storytelling *craft*.

Developmental editing tends to think small and big at the same time, weaving in feedback on all areas of your project, from voice at the sentence level to the overall trajectories of your character and plot, including subplots. It addresses bigger questions about your story, thinking about character change, theme, your use of imagery, and more.

Some of the editors providing developmental editing services—especially those with publishing industry experience—will even comment on your book's market chances, how to strengthen the project with an eye toward getting a literary agent, and how to pitch the work.

When you purchase developmental editing, you're really investing in a full-service treatment of your project. That is why costs tend to be highest with this level of service.

HIRING AN EDITOR

First, it's up to you to decide what level of editorial services you need. Next, start researching editors to see what each offers and how much they charge.

Once upon a time, professional editors charged by page count. These days, most of us charge per word, so having an accurate word count of your project is important.

I charge on a sliding scale of between one and a half up to five cents per word.

What fee I end up quoting an author depends on several things. If a writer whose work I'm not familiar with contacts me, I ask for a sample of the manuscript they want me to edit. I usually request around six pages, double-spaced in a standard 12-point font, along with the total word count of the entire project.

I read and edit those pages, at no charge, and return the edited file back to the writer, along with a fee quote. I base my fee on how labor intensive I estimate the job being.

I've edited a six-page sample that may only require a dozen or so edit notes. Conversely, I have also spent *hours* on six pages in which I had to insert close to 100 notes. Guess which of those two writers are going to receive the lower quote!

There is another reason I edit a sample for a potential client. That's so the author can see not only the quality of my work, but also how I operate. Not only do I flag typos, improper word usage, grammatical errors, and other basic issues, but I also make specific suggestions on how to rewrite certain sections. Then I leave final creative decisions up to the author. As a writer myself, I would never want anyone else to outright change my work, usurping my personal creative choices and altering my author's voice.

By the way, I use the "Insert Comments" function in Microsoft Word. I highlight the word, clause, sentence, or area each note references, and insert a comment balloon containing my note. I don't *rewrite* any part of the original manuscript.

I WILL OFFER YOU A FRIENDLY WORD OF ADVICE: I would be wary of any editor who gives you a flat fee quote without requesting to read a sample of your project first. There are several inherent problems there.

1. The editor may quote you more than you should pay, based on how much work your job will require. And, I seriously doubt you'll get any of your money refunded.

2. Likewise, the editor may quote you much less than a quality professional would charge you. That means one of two things: either they will end up asking you for more money partway into the project, or you won't get your money's worth—even if you didn't pay much.

I've actually had several authors hire me to clean up the butchered job an unqualified self-proclaimed editor already did. And, that means the unfortunate author ended up paying twice! Please don't let that happen to you.

Furthermore, I would *never* hire an editor who charges by the hour—at least not for a book manuscript. Always get a hard quote up front. Otherwise, you may have to pay an exorbitantly high bill before they send you the edited project.

NOW, LET'S TALK ABOUT BEING YOUR OWN EDITOR—at least your *first* editor.

Having read more pages than I can count over the years, I will share a proven phenomena I have seen over and over again.

The human brain has a tendency to autocorrect our own writing—in our <u>minds</u>, *not* on the page.

I can usually tell when that's the cause of an error. There have been times in my critique workshops where I will ask an author to read aloud a specific sentence they've written. Usually there's a word or two missing, most normally a simple article such as a, an, or the. Guess what? When the author reads the sentence, they read the missing word without realizing it's missing on the page. Those types of issues are difficult for us to catch in our own writing.

I want to address some relatively simple things you can do to preliminarily edit your own work. The benefits to that are two fold:

For one, you'll be able to submit a much cleaner manuscript to an editor, which will hopefully result in your paying less for a professional edit. And all it will require on your part is time.

The second benefit is the better editing skills you develop, the better writer you will become and the cleaner your early drafts will be, including your first draft. That will ultimately save you time as well as money.

The bottom line is it's not easy to be objective about your own writing! But with time and practice, you may find you're able to self-edit your own creative work with an increasingly objective eye.

<u>**Here are 10 tips to help you edit your own work**</u>

1. **Distance yourself from your project.**

Once you finish your first draft or even a few chapters, put it aside for a while. I don't mean a few minutes or a couple of hours, I'm talking about a day or two for several chapters or even a week or more for an entire manuscript. Then proofread it with fresher eyes. Rather than remember the perfect work you had in mind when you were writing, you're more likely to see what you've *actually* written.

2. Look for one type of problem at a time.

Read through your text several times, concentrating first on readability, then sentence structure, then paragraph structure, then word choice, then spelling, and finally punctuation. (Or do it in whatever order you prefer.)

As the old saying goes, if you look for trouble, you're likely to find it. By the way, if you discover you have a specific recurring problem, let's say using "their" when you should type "they're," do a separate search for instances of that.

3. Double-check facts, figures, and proper names.

In addition to reviewing for correct spelling and word usage, make sure all the information in your text is accurate and consistent throughout. I can't count the number of times writers have changed something partway through their work—the name of a character for example—but forgot to check the entire manuscript for the old name.

4. Review a hard copy.

Print out your text and review it line by line. Reading your work in a different format may help you catch errors you previously missed. A number of the writers I work with insist they always see mistakes in a printed copy that they overlooked when reading from a computer screen.

5. Read your text aloud.

You may *hear* a problem (a faulty verb ending or a missing word) that you weren't able to *see* on the page. In addition to catching technical errors, reading aloud can help you determine if the dialogue sounds believable or suits the characters well. I sometimes read my work into a digital recorder and then play it back. But, don't read along—just listen, and listen carefully.

6. Use a spellchecker and grammar-checking software.

A spellchecker can help you catch repeated works, reversed letters, and many other common errors. Also, engage your computer's grammar-checking tools and pay attention to it as you write and edit. (Most programs, such as Word, allow you to change the "default" settings in various ways.) But, be aware of the fact that computer programs are not foolproof. They get things wrong, too. Still, the programs are right more often than they are wrong.

7. Trust your dictionary.

In most cases, your spellchecker can tell you only if a word *is* a word, not if it is the *right* word. For instance, if you aren't 100% certain whether the Mojave is a **d-e-s-e-r-t** or a **d-e-s-s-e-r-t**,

visit the dictionary. Most word processing programs have a built-in dictionary and thesaurus. Please use them.

There are also free online dictionaries, such as merriam-webster.com and dictionary.com, you can reference as you work. Keep it open in a background window on your computer and pull it up whenever you wish to double-check something.

If you prefer to write offline, spend a few dollars to purchase an up-to-date electronic dictionary that you can load onto your computer. I have *Webster's New World Dictionary & Thesaurus* on my desktop.

Always remember: the dictionary and thesaurus are our friends.

8. Create your own proofreading checklist.

Look for "tells" in your work, and put together a list of mistakes you commonly make, and then refer to that list each time you proofread. Check for each of your usual errors as you go through your work. Another handy tool in this phase is the *Find* in the *Edit* function of the toolbar in MS Word. For example, if you have a habit of sometimes typing "were" when it should be "where," simply open the Find tool and enter "were" in the *Find what:* box. Click on *More* and, one at a time, it will instantly take you to that word. Then decide if that's the right word or if you need to change it. (If you aren't sure where to find certain tools in your computer, try accessing your program's "Help" function to learn how to do things.)

9. Ask for human help.

Ask other people, preferably other writers, to proofread your text after you have written, rewritten, edited, and reviewed it. A fresh set of eyes may immediately spot errors you have overlooked. The right Beta Reader can be very helpful.

That's one of the benefits of joining a writing critique group. Find an existing workshop or create a new one with fellow authors you know.

If any of you are interested in being in one of *my* critique workshops, I'm thinking about starting a new one in the near future. Just email me at writerboles@aol.com and let me know. Likewise if you need an editor.

10. Read your text backward.

Another way to catch spelling errors is to read backward, from right to left, starting with the last word in your text. Reading your work in that manner can help you focus on individual words rather than sentences.

FYI: I don't normally use the reading backward method, although I know a few writers who do it regularly and think it's a great way to catch little, but important, things. I've only done it on short pieces such as business letters, query letters, synopses, and the like; but I will admit it can be helpful.

IN CLOSING - Here is a quote every writer should always keep in mind:

*"We should not write so that it is possible for the reader to understand us, but so that it is **impossible** for him to misunderstand us."* - Marcus Fabius Quintilianus aka Quintilian (c.35-96)

What that means is one of the biggest obstacles we face as writers is we know *exactly* what we mean when we write something. The problem is we are not always successful in accurately relaying our message to our readers. The key to good writing is clarity of meaning and ease of reading.

ONE MORE QUOTE

The great and prolific Mark Twain knew how hard it is to proofread our own work effectively. As he said in a letter to Walter Bessant in February 1898:

"You think you are reading proof, whereas you are merely reading your own mind; your statement of the thing is full of holes & vacancies but you don't know it, because you are filling them from your mind as you go along. Sometimes—but not often enough—the printer's proof-reader saves you—and offends you—with this cold sign in the margin: (?) & you search the passage and find that the insulter is right—it doesn't say what you thought it did: the gas-fixtures are there, but you didn't light the jets."