

INTRODUCTION TO COPYEDITING:

What It Is and What It Isn't

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Editor: One who revises, corrects, or arranges the contents and style of the literary, artistic, or musical work of others for publication or presentation; one who alters or revises another's work to make it conform to some standard or serve a particular purpose. (Webster's Third International Dictionary)

Good editing should be invisible; editors, however, are not. Ask an author about editors as a breed and the response may range from profound gratitude to contempt. All too often the relationship between authors and editors is adversarial, but it needn't be so. Ideally, authors and editors complement each other, both striving to convey ideas seamlessly to the reader.

The negative stereotype of the editor/author relationship was captured by a *New Yorker* cartoon that showed two men with muttonchop whiskers sitting across a desk. One, holding a manuscript, is saying to the other, "Come, come, Mr. Dickens, it was either the best of times or the worst of times. It could not have been both." An author produces the perfect sentence and the editor quibbles over trifles; editors are "comma people," authors are "content people." Like most stereotypes, this one contains a grain of truth. Authors in general are more concerned with content and editors with its expression. As a division of labor, this one is as valid as any other.

This book addresses a particular kind of editing called copyediting. Copyeditors examine a manuscript sentence by sentence. By the time a copyeditor gets the manuscript, larger decisions, such as additions, deletions, or reorganizations, have already been made by other editors or reviewers.

Copyediting is different from substantive editing, which is concerned with those larger decisions. A copyeditor examines a manuscript for spelling, grammar, punctuation, consistency, and conformity to style. As one longtime editor put it, "The ultimate goal is to produce a sentence that sounds as if it could have been written no other way....You, the editor, are a bridge between two people, the person who has written and the person who will or may read."

Copyeditors take a manuscript and polish the language; they strive to make the author's meaning as clear as possible, to save readers from editorial inconsistencies that at best distract them from the content and at worst cloud the author's meaning. Copyeditors make sure that a manuscript will stand up to the scrutiny of both the author's peers and the general public. The copyeditor is often the last line of defense against absurdities that creep into print and embarrass the most diligent authors.

Editing in general and copyediting in particular are skills you learn by doing. However, most editors share common traits—a love of the written word, an appreciation of language in all its richness, a desire to see order emerge from chaos in the form of a manuscript that sings or speaks from the heart. The intellectual challenge is always there, but more than anything else, editing is fun—so much fun that it's easy to get carried away.

The following example shows “before-and-after” examples of substantive editing, copyediting, and proofreading.

This is the original.

The giraffe's circulatory system is specially adopted for it's long neck. A giraffe's hear weighs more that 24 pounds and pumps approximately 16 gallons of blood a minute. They have a special valve in the blood vessels of their neck. This special value allows them to been down to get a drink of water without passing out from the rush of blood to the brain.

The idea that giraffes are moot is a myth. Though normally silent, giraffes may sneeze, blear, snore, cough, and even make a very-low mooing sound. When upset, they snort and growl. Another myth about giraffes are that they don't lie down to sleep, in fact they do but only for a few minutes. They usually rest standing up, flicking their ears and keeping one eye open, always alert of what is going on. Giraffes only sleep deeply for a few minutes at a time. Another myth about giraffes is that its front legs are longer than their hind ones. In fact the length of both front and hind is about the same (the foreleg is only 1/10th longer than the hind.) It is the high shoulders which give the false impression of a difference in limb length too.

Definitions

These definitions are in chronological order. A manuscript usually goes through the following steps on its journey from idea to publication.

Writing to specification (as opposed to creative writing) means starting from an idea, with no manuscript or with notes alone; it includes research, interviews, consultations, draft preparation, and revisions.

Substantive editing includes reorganizing, rewriting, writing transitions and summaries, helping plan schedules, attending meetings, and consulting with authors and publishers.

Copyediting means reviewing a “finished” manuscript (copy) for spelling, grammar, consistency, and format. Copyeditors also check the completeness, accuracy, and format of tables, bibliographies, references, and footnotes. Copyediting doesn’t usually include rewriting or reorganization, but it does include reducing wordiness and reviewing the content for logic.

This version shows online proofreading, the first level of editorial service. The proofreader has corrected basic spelling and format errors, as well as egregious grammar and usage errors that would be picked up in a “light copyedit” or “editorial proofread.” (Proofreading on paper uses a very different system of marking from copyediting.)

The giraffe’s circulatory system is specially ~~adopted~~ adapted for it’s long neck. A giraffe’s heart weighs more ~~that~~ than 24 pounds and pumps approximately 16 gallons of blood a minute. They have a special valve in the blood vessels of their neck. This special ~~value~~ valve allows them to ~~been~~ bend down to get a drink of water without passing out from the rush of blood to the brain.

The idea that giraffes are ~~meot~~ mute is a myth. Though normally silent, giraffes may sneeze, bleat, snore, cough, and even make a very-low mooing sound. When upset, they snort and growl. Another myth about giraffes ~~are~~ is that they don’t lie down to sleep; in fact they do but only for a few minutes. They usually rest standing up, flicking their ears and keeping one eye open, always alert of what is going on. Giraffes only sleep deeply for a few minutes at a time. Another myth about giraffes is that its front legs are longer than their hind ones. In fact the length of both front and hind is about the same (the foreleg is only 1/10th longer than the hind.) It is the high shoulders which give the false impression of a difference in limb length too.

Proofreading means checking the final typeset version (proof) against the manuscript version to find typographical errors and deviations from typesetting or word processing instructions. Proofreaders query (question), but normally don't change, editorial errors and inconsistencies.

As with any other task, it's important to know how copyediting fits into the larger picture. This understanding makes instructions more relevant and can even determine the level of effort you expend. Copyeditors aren't expected to redo the work of the author and substantive editor, but rather to polish and complete it. Everyone works together to produce a harmonious whole.

Because copyeditors need to be very familiar with the rules of the language, this book incorporates a review of grammar and punctuation and includes examples and alternate

This version shows a standard online copyedit, the second level of editorial service. The editor has corrected spelling and other basic errors and changed wording to improve clarity and flow. See Chapter 3 for the standard copyediting marks used on hard copy.

The giraffe's circulatory system is specially ~~adopted~~ adapted for its long neck. A giraffe's heart weighs more ~~that~~ than 24 pounds and pumps ~~approximately~~ about 16 gallons of blood a minute. ~~They~~ Giraffes have a special valve in the blood vessels of their neck. ~~This special valve that~~ allows them to ~~been~~ bend down to get a drink of water without passing out from ~~the~~ a rush of blood to the brain.

The idea that giraffes are ~~meat~~ mute is a myth. Though normally silent, giraffes ~~may~~ can sneeze, bleat, snore, cough, and even make a very-low mooing sound. When upset, they snort and growl. Another myth about giraffes ~~are~~ is that they don't lie down to sleep; in fact they do lie down but only for a few minutes at a time. They usually rest standing up, flicking their ears and keeping one eye open, always alert ~~of to~~ what is going on. Giraffes ~~only~~ sleep deeply for only a few minutes at a time. Another myth about giraffes is that ~~its~~ their front legs are longer than their hind ones. In fact, ~~the length of both the front and hind legs are~~ is about the same length (~~—the foreleg-front legs is~~ are only ~~1/10th~~ 10 percent longer than the ~~hindback legs~~). It is the giraffe's high shoulders ~~which that~~ gives the ~~false~~ impression of a difference in limb length ~~too~~.

solutions. Exercises will teach concepts and test skills. Often there's no right or wrong answer; some solutions are simply better than others.

The basic tools of the copyeditor's trade are a dictionary and a style manual. Editing often means ensuring conformity to a style, and this book compares some commonly used styles on such points as punctuation, abbreviation, and numbers. It also discusses what a style decision is and how it differs from a rule of grammar. Copyeditors who work for a publisher will need to become familiar with that publisher's preferred style. Freelance copyeditors may need to switch among several styles for different clients—a more demanding task. Chapter 11, *Editorial Style: Manuals and Word Lists*, compares several widely used style manuals.

Bear in mind that a copyeditor is not an English teacher. An English teacher is justified in pointing out problems in a composition and expecting the student to correct them. The copyeditor's job is to eliminate those problems.

This version shows a substantive edit, the third level of editorial service. The editor has reorganized and rewritten much of the text to make it more logical, accessible, and useful.

Giraffes have some unusual characteristics. The giraffe's circulatory system is specially adapted for its long neck. An adult giraffe's heart, which weighs more than 24 pounds, pumps about 16 gallons of blood a minute. A special valve in the blood vessels of the neck allows the animal to bend down to drink without passing out from a rush of blood to the brain. A number of myths about giraffes need to be refuted:

That they are mute. Although normally silent, giraffes can sneeze, bleat, snore, and cough. When upset, they snort and growl.

That they don't lie down to sleep. In fact, they do, but only for a few minutes at a time. They usually rest standing up, flicking their ears and keeping one eye open, alert to what is going on.

That their forelegs are much longer than their hind ones. In fact, the forelegs are only about 10 percent longer than the hind ones; the giraffe's high shoulders are responsible for the illusion that the legs are very different in length.



The Publications Team

Nutritionists have a food pyramid; publications people have a work team pyramid. Here's one typical way it is stacked: Overseeing the publishing process is the project manager. The editorial assistant works with the project manager, while the researcher is more likely to work with the writer. The writer's draft goes through the hands of the substantive editor and the copyeditor. Following the writer's review of the edits and responses to queries, the manuscript enters the production process. A designer develops specs for the finished product. The desktop publisher and Web specialist make the designer's concept a reality. The proofreader and quality control specialist ensure that no mistakes have crept in along the way. The printing specialist (or production manager) selects an appropriate printer for the job and monitors its progress. Voilà—an error-free, professional-looking publication makes it to the goalpost!



Exercise 1: Spelling Test

Instructions: Cross through every misspelled word and write out the entire word with the correct spelling in the blank provided.

_____ The occurrence of a misspelled word in print is totally
_____ impermissible. The affect is disastrous, an embarrass-
_____ ment to the printer, a distraction to the reader, and a
_____ slurr on the writer's competence. Misspelling is a sign
_____ that the role of the proofreader has been slighted or
_____ misunderstood. Although the proofreader is principlly
_____ committed to seeing that the proof follows the copy
_____ accurately, there is a further committment to preventing
_____ the author, editor, or printer from looking ridiculous.
_____ A practitioner of proofreading is never presumtuous in
_____ correcting (or—better—querying) an incorrect spelling.
_____ Let no conscientious proofreader wholly acquiesce to
_____ the rule of “follow copy” in regard to spelling.

Exercise I Answers

The occurrence of a misspelled word in print is ~~totaly~~

totally

impermissible. The ~~effect~~ is disastrous, an embarrass-

effect

ment to the printer, a distraction to the reader, and a

~~slur~~ on the writer's competence. Misspelling is a sign

slur

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misunderstood. Although the proofreader is ~~principlly~~

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accurately, there is a further ~~commitment~~ to preventing

commitment

the author, editor, or printer from looking ~~ridiculous,~~

ridiculous

A practitioner of proofreading is never ~~presumptuous~~ in

presumptuous

correcting (or—better—querying) an incorrect spelling.

Let no conscientious proofreader ~~wholey~~ acquiesce to

wholly

the rule of “follow copy” in regard to spelling.

Exercise I, continued

Instructions: Choose one of the two letters in parentheses to complete the word.

- | | | | |
|---------------|-------|------------------|-------|
| 1. comput_r | (e;o) | 7. inadvert_nt | (e;a) |
| 2. deduct_ble | (a;i) | 8. indispens_ble | (a;i) |
| 3. defend_nt | (a;e) | 9. m_mento | (e;o) |
| 4. depend_nt | (a;e) | 10. resist_nt | (a;e) |
| 5. dissen_ion | (s;t) | 11. sep_rate | (a;e) |
| 6. super_ede | (c;s) | 12. tox_n | (e;i) |

Exercise I Answers

- | | | | |
|------------------------|-----|---------------------------|-----|
| 1. comput <u>r</u> | (e) | 7. inadvert <u>t</u> | (e) |
| 2. deduct <u>i</u> ble | (i) | 8. indispens <u>a</u> ble | (a) |
| 3. defend <u>a</u> nt | (a) | 9. m <u>e</u> mento | (e) |
| 4. depend <u>e</u> nt | (e) | 10. resist <u>a</u> nt | (a) |
| 5. dissens <u>i</u> on | (s) | 11. separ <u>a</u> te | (a) |
| 6. supers <u>e</u> de | (s) | 12. tox <u>i</u> n | (i) |

For words such as *dependent*, *dissension*, and *memento*, your dictionary may list more than one spelling. Always use the first spelling, which is the one more commonly preferred. Because dictionaries vary, be sure to use the one your client or employer prefers. Also, assume nothing. Don't automatically change the word *materiel* to *material* or *tranches* to *branches*: Check the context and look it up.