

How to Pick the Right Editor for Your Book

Report #116

Every book should be edited, but well-qualified book editors don't come cheap, the process takes weeks, and many editors require payment in advance. We've probably all heard horror stories from authors who chose the wrong editor. Some failed to finish the project and others did a poor job. Each sad account represents lost time, wasted money, and a less-than-marketable book. How then can you be sure beforehand that you've picked the right editor?

When I ask disgruntled authors why they chose a particular editor, they give me one of two answers: "He had the lowest price" or "She had the fastest turnaround time." Price and turnaround are uppermost in the minds of many authors, yet they are the last things authors should consider.

The search for the right editor begins with finding editors in the first place. Get recommendations from friends who have used an editor. Ask the president of your writers club to recommend someone. Search the Internet. The editors you consider don't have to be local; you'll severely limit your possibilities.

Once you identify three to five possible editors, it is time to be both objective and subjective. I'll explain each process.

Be Objective

1. Research all your potential editors' names on the Internet to see what people are saying about them. Check out the editors' own websites, too.
2. Select only candidates that are full-time editors. Many unqualified editors have "day jobs."
3. Choose editors that have edited traditionally published books as well as self-published ones. While editors should never disclose the contents of unpublished manuscripts, the titles of published books are not subject to nondisclosure.
4. Pick out the editors who have been editing books for at least five years.
5. Eliminate any book editor that does not follow Chicago style, the style guide preferred by book publishers worldwide.
6. Ask for references, and check them. If an editor says the information is proprietary, the editor may not have any good references.
7. Determine the types of editing each editor offers and decide which type suits you and your book. Line editing, or copy editing, corrects grammar and punctuation but does not analyze the content and writing style or suggest improvements. Developmental or content editing may include only evaluation and suggestions for expansion, reduction, or improvement without

providing line editing. Your best bet is to use an editor who offers both line and content editing at the same time.

8. Request information on what and how the editors charge—by the page, by the word, or by the hour. Disregard any editors that won't reveal their prices up front. Eliminate the editors who charge by the hour, because such an arrangement is unpredictable.

9. Ask editors if they perform the work themselves or use subcontractors. Exclude the ones who contract out the work. The subcontractors may be inferior editors.

10. Inquire about each editor's typical turnaround time. Expect anywhere from two to eight weeks. Anything fast may not be good, and anything longer than eight weeks may mean the editor is not working full-time.

11. Consider getting sample edits of a few pages. If in a sample an editor tells you what *you* did wrong, instead of telling you what could be improved in your *writing*, that person is critiquing you, not your writing. Move on to editors who evaluate your writing. Each editor will make different changes. If you don't like an editor's suggestions, compare them to the other editors' suggestions. If more than one editor says the same thing, you could be overly sensitive. If you disagree with too many things from some of the editors, jettison them.

A word about free samples: Newer editors may offer a free sample edit of a few pages. Take advantage of the offer, but don't let the word *free* cloud your judgment. Well-established editors may charge a small fee for a sample edit, but it's a bargain if it helps you find the right editor for your book.

After you have gathered the above information from your potential editors, you probably will have eliminated one or more. Move on to the subjective part to reduce the pack even further.

Be Subjective

We get gut feelings about subjective things, things that aren't quite quantifiable. Here are some subjective things to consider after contacting each editor:

1. Did you feel apprehensive while talking with your potential editor? Trust the small voice inside you. If it says something is wrong, move on to the next editor on your list.
2. Did any potential editor give you a sales pitch, apply pressure, try to make you commit, or offer a discount for an immediate commitment? If so, the person is a skilled salesperson, rather than a skilled editor. Most skilled editors are like me, low-key, no-pressure people. We aren't in the sales business; we are in the business of helping writers succeed.
3. Was there any miscommunication with your potential editor that wasn't resolved to your satisfaction? If so, you may be dealing with someone who doesn't fit your personality.
4. Did the editors answer all your questions or tell you where on their websites you could find answers, or did one or more editor deflect your questions or even refuse to answer?

As you perform all these tasks, you will whittle down your list to the best person for you and your book.

Professional editors charge for their experience and time, and most have a backlog of work, so your project may not start right away. Be objective and subjective in your search and then choose wisely, pay a fair price, and be patient, and you will be rewarded with a job well done.

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