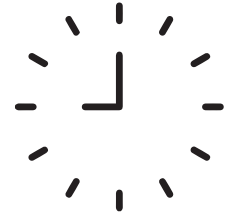




5 MISTAKES WRITERS MAKE WHEN HIRING AN EDITOR

Do you need to hire an editor but feel unaccountably nervous about the prospect? I've been a writer, editor and writing coach for the last 40 years. Let me share with you the five big mistakes I see many writers make:

1. They want an editor too early



It's hard to write in your lonely garret with no feedback from anyone — except perhaps the rare sympathetic family member. Writers want — and need — detailed, knowledgeable feedback, so it shouldn't be surprising that many of them want to get their work in the hands of an editor as quickly as possible.

But I've found many writers don't actually want unvarnished feedback. Instead, they want to be told that they've done an excellent job. That their writing is rich and meaningful and that it's bound to get a lucrative deal from XYZ publishing company.

If this is your desire from editing, then hold yourself back. Editing, by definition, is going to be criticism. A few editors might add the occasional "great story" or "nice metaphor" comment to your manuscript, but most of them won't. Instead, they'll focus on what's wrong with your book, what can be improved.

Of course you need this feedback, but remind yourself that you want your book to be in the best shape possible before you start getting edited. This means that you need to spend considerable time editing yourself before you send your work to another person.

You should also consider getting feedback from beta readers — friends and colleagues who read your book for free and tell you, in detail, what they think. They won't replace a good editor but they will supplement the work of that person.

And if you do vigorous editing yourself first, then more vigorous editing after you have feedback from your beta readers, the work you will send to your editor will be so much better. This will allow your editor to work at a higher level, and it will reduce the cost of editing for you.

2. They don't look for a professional editor



Many people ask me if it's okay to hire a friend who is really good at spotting typos, or their former 8th grade English teacher "who has such a good eye," to edit their work. I hope it won't surprise you to hear me say no.

Good editors are professionals. Most have taken extra training, in the form of university-level courses — some even have Master's degrees in the subject — and they have hundreds to thousands of hours of work experience.

While having a good eye is important, editing requires so much more than that. In addition to being able to catch spelling and grammar errors, editors understand the realities of the publishing world. They know the length required (80,000 words is the working average for a first book), the expectations publishers will have, and the expectations readers will have as well.

Even what appears to be simple on the surface — the job of proofreading — is infinitely more complex than most people imagine. Proofreaders don't just look for typos — they also check page flow, headers, typefaces, captions and errors that might have been added by graphic artists or typesetters.

Editing is a professional job in the same way being a doctor, lawyer, teacher or engineer is a professional job.

3. They don't know there are five different types of editors



People imagine editing to be a one-size fits all job. Instead, however, there are at least five different types. If you don't know which sort of editing you really need, you could end up spending a lot of money that won't do you much good. Here are the five types, although understand, that not everyone uses the same names for them:

Manuscript evaluation: This is the least expensive form of editing and most useful to fiction writers who want overall feedback on their manuscript. The editor reads the whole book and then writes a report on it, recommending changes that you should consider making.

Developmental editing: This is the most expensive form of editing and perhaps most useful to people who are determined to get an agent or a book deal with a traditional publishing house. It's "big picture" editing (no attention to spelling or grammar) looking at the overall concept of the book and suggesting new ideas or different ways of approaching the story/topic.

Line-editing: Line editors go through your book sentence by sentence and not only correct errors but also look at your word choice, sentence construction and flow. (This job is sometimes combined with copy editing.)

Copy-editing: Copy editors go through your book sentence by sentence looking for spelling and grammar errors. (This job is sometimes combined with line editing.)

Proofreading: Proofreaders check the first printed copy of your book (or material) looking for errors and visual inconsistencies. This work requires training and you will get a far better result from a professional rather than from even a wildly talented non-professional.

4. They don't spend enough time choosing their editor



When the end of any project appears on the horizon, we all want to be finished with it. We're tired and worn out and we're starting to lose patience with it. But guard against these feelings when you're going to hire an editor. If you choose the wrong person, you'll only end up wasting your money and increasing your frustration.

I've seen too many people hire the first editor they've spoken with. Don't do that! Instead, take the time you need to find someone who's good and, more importantly, a good fit for you. Understanding what type of editor you need (see point 3, above) is essential to this process.

After that, I suggest you interview with a minimum of three editors (and a maximum of five to keep the process manageable). Ask them questions about how they work. Tell them about your project. Get a sense of how you would feel receiving negative feedback from this person. Are they sympathetic enough to make the idea reasonable? If you have any hesitations, knock that person off the list.

Then, ask for references. People are generally on their best behaviour when being interviewed. But if you can talk to three other people who have worked with this person, you'll get a much more realistic idea of what they're really like.

I know, that sounds like a lot of work. I'm asking you to do a minimum of nine interviews (three editors plus three references each). But it's your money you're going to be spending. And, your time and emotional energy as well. It's important to protect yourself and your manuscript.

5. They buy on price alone



If you've ever hired a contractor for a home renovation, based solely on price, you'll probably understand the mistake of this philosophy. People who do jobs for the least amount of money possible generally cut corners somewhere to make that price possible.

Of course, I'm not saying you should hire the person proposing the most expensive price. Far from it. Instead, I'm saying you need to consider a wide range of factors first. Does the editor work in your genre? Do they seem to be a kind and helpful person? Can they do the job within the time-frame you need?

Finally, what is their price? If you can't afford editing, you can't afford it. But make sure that your expectations are reasonable. Most of us tend to know the value of real estate in our own cities. If the price is more than 20% up or down from the average, we're likely to be suspicious – either, “what's wrong with the house that it's so expensive” or “what's wrong with the house that it's so cheap?” And the same is true for cars.

When you're buying editing, pretend you're buying a house or a car and don't do it on price alone.

I hope this very quick guide — to the mistakes people make when hiring an editor — to be both useful and informative. For anyone interested in more detail, I'm also attaching a video to this package. It features interviews with five different editors that I think you'll also find helpful.

As Abe Lincoln said, “Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.” Never neglect the time and effort needed before you take any action.