



An E-Book for Writers and Editors

How to Find the Right Editor

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You've slaved over your writing, sweating every thought, every word. It's like your child, ready to be sent out into the wide world.

Wait!

You'd ensure your child is fully prepared for the real world, wouldn't you? You'd ensure their face is clean, their clothes are neat and tidy, and they've been schooled about the world, right?

Don't let your writing go out any less ready.

First impressions are crucial in our harried culture. No one will take time to read your writing all the way through if it isn't flawless. You won't get a second chance to impress. You need to hire an editor.

But how do you find the *right* editor for you?

A Writer's Wish List

My editor:

- ▶ Is well acquainted with my topic or industry
- ▶ Has experience in the level of editing I need
- ▶ Is familiar with my style guide (APA, Chicago, AP, etc.)
- ▶ Has experience with my medium (book, business reports, Web, etc.)
- ▶ Knows how to use the software my copy is in (Word, Acrobat, InCopy, etc.)
- ▶ Contacts me with questions about the copy or the project
- ▶ Warns me if the project will take longer than expected

Does My Editor Have to Be an Industry Expert?

The short answer is that it depends.

Let's say you've written a book on the medical advances of the last 50 years. If you want your editor to catch errors in scientific names or medical procedures, you'd better hire someone who understands those names and procedures.

Or maybe you've written the next Great American Novel. Your editor should be an experienced fiction editor, with expertise in the trade-book or the self-publishing market, depending on how you'll publish your book.

And if your copy contains a lot of jargon, you want someone familiar with that jargon. Otherwise, your editor will spend their time—and your money—learning your jargon.

That said, there are times when it doesn't matter if your editor is new to your industry. If your copy is for a mainstream audience, your editor doesn't need to be an expert in your field. You want them to catch instances where mainstream readers might be confused.

What Kind of Editing Do I Need?

You know you need someone to look over your writing, maybe spruce it up a bit, but what exactly do you want your editor to do? Do you want someone to look at your ideas, help you organize or develop them? Do you need someone to read through and correct all the typos and nothing else?

Most likely, you need something in between. Here are the definitions I use with my clients for different stages of editing:

- ▶ **Developmental editing:** Working with acquisition editors or authors to develop a text or evaluate a manuscript for content and accuracy
- ▶ **Substantive editing:** Correcting copy for organization, structure, transitions, redundancy, jargon, sexist language, awkward construction, excessive use of passive voice, wordiness, logic, tone, and more
- ▶ **Copyediting:** Correcting copy for spelling, grammar, punctuation, style, usage, sentence structure, sentence length, and paragraph length
- ▶ **Fact-checking:** Checking factual accuracy of the copy, such as names, addresses, phone numbers, URLs, and dates
- ▶ **Editorial proofreading:** Correcting copy for spelling, grammar, punctuation, usage, and style
- ▶ **Proofreading:** Comparing the latest version of a document (“live copy”) with the previous version (“dead copy”), including any indicated changes in the dead copy

If you're still not sure of what you need, make a list of things you want corrected and what you want left alone. A well-rounded editor should be able to handle your list. They should also be able to tell you what your copy needs if you're totally at sea.

With my clients, I talk about what kinds of things they want me to correct. I will give an honest opinion of what the copy needs, but in the end, it's their project. I'll do what the client wants.

Finding the Right Editor

It's OK to want proof of an editor's abilities. You do it for other services, why not editing?

One approach is to see an editor's past work: viewing marked-up documents and final pieces. There are hurdles, though. Not all clients want others to see their marked-up documents or proprietary content. Too, not all documents are the same. What works for one document may not work for another.

A better way to judge an editor's ability, and something I offer my clients for free, is to edit a sample of your copy. The sample shouldn't be too long; 500–1,000 words is what I like to see. Take something from the middle of the piece or let the editor choose from the entire manuscript. The beginning and the end have either been picked over several times and are in better shape or are in the early stages and are still rough. Either one would give you and the editor a false idea of what the copy needs.

When you read through the results, ask yourself:

- ▶ Does the copy read better? Do I like the way it sounds?
- ▶ Did the editor miss any glaring errors?
- ▶ Did they introduce errors into the copy?
- ▶ Did they ask good questions? Present good solutions?

References

Sometimes the competition for a project or an ongoing relationship is fierce. References are a good place to distinguish one editor from another. LinkedIn allows users to post recommendations to other people's profiles. This is a handy place to start. You can also check out the editor's website for client reviews. Or search the web for the editor's name. Do you find accolades or regrets?

If your project is particularly large—or you will send this editor lots of projects—ask to speak to past clients. Talk to someone whose project is similar to yours, so you can make an apples-to-apples comparison.

Where Should I Look for an Editor?

Personal recommendations are still the best way to find any service, including editing.

You can also check out sources that focus on editing or publishing. Editorial organizations, such as the [Editorial Freelancers Association](#) (EFA) and [National Association of Independent Writers and Editors](#) (NAIWE), have directories of members, and [MediaBistro](#) is home to many media professionals, including editors.

KOKEdit maintains a page of places [editors can look for work](#); one may be right for you to post your job on. General job boards are OK, but most job seekers there are looking for permanent work. It's like finding a needle a haystack.

Steer clear of bidding services. While it's true you'll pay the lowest dollar, you'll also get what you pay for. Experienced editors want to be paid a fair wage and don't look for work on such sites. The EFA also posts a [list of common rates](#); while rates can vary wildly from industry to industry and based on experience, the EFA is a good place to start.

In the end, you should feel comfortable with your editor. They should be professional, knowledgeable, and approachable. As with any other purchase, doing your homework pays off in quality and value.



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About the Author



Erin Brenner, owner of [Right Touch Editing](#), has been an editing professional for two decades, specializing in content marketing and website materials. Her clients includes SAP, ITSMA, and Collins Education Associates.

Erin shares her expertise through her work as editor of [Copyediting](#), as an instructor in UCSD's [copyediting certificate program](#), and as a speaker.

Contact Erin at erin@righttouchediting.com to help you with your next project.