FINDING, HIRING, AND WORKING WITH A PROFESSIONAL EDITOR

Checklists for Finding the Best Editor for You!

Bonus Section: Dealing with Problems

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AdkEd

Getting Started

This article is not going to cover [why you should hire an editor](#) or [why you shouldn't](#). If you don't want to hire an editor, don't think you need to hire an editor, or already have a great editor on board, then you can skip this article. Otherwise, let's proceed!

Please note that this article discusses nonfiction and fiction book editors and yes, I use the singular "they."

Part 1: How Do You Find a Professional Editor?

Since there are no global professional standards for becoming an editor, anyone can "hang out a shingle" and call themselves an editor. While finding any old editor is easy-peasy, finding a professional is a little more difficult.

By the way—start looking three to six months before you need an editor. Just because you finished your book yesterday doesn't mean the person you ultimately choose will have an immediate opening!

There are editing organizations with member databases you can search, but in some, anyone can join and there are no testing standards to be met for inclusion. [The Editorial Freelancer's Association](#) and [Editors Canada](#) are two such sites. They're excellent places to start since they're well known, offer excellent editorial training, and most professional editors absorb the expense of joining. Other organizations, such as [Chartered Institute of Editing and Proofreading (CIEP)](#), also offer editorial training programs and

certify that their members meet certain standards. There may be other organizations, but these are the top three sites that also contain a member directory.

Reviewing Your Top Picks

Once you've picked out several editors to review—10 is a good place to start—check out their websites and other social media profiles carefully. While there are some good editors who don't have a website, the cost of maintaining a website (both financially and in time spent designing and updating one) is a standard business expense. Professional editors treat editing as a business. If all you can find is a simple Facebook page, they either haven't been in business very long, or perhaps do not treat their business professionally.

Keep in mind that how long someone has been in business or [how much or how little they charge](#) are not indicators of how good an editor they are, even if they're the best and cheapest editor you find. You may be lucky to find an excellent new freelancer at a relatively low price, or you may be unfortunate enough to hire a "big name" without looking any further and pay a lot of money for a very poor edit.

Part 1 Ranking Checklist

You can use this system to score potential editors (the highest results are the best). You can create your own ranking checklist by choosing which qualifications are important to you:

- Are they a member of one (or more) of the top three editing organizations mentioned above?

  (Yes, 10 pts; no, 0 pts)

- Do they have a full website with a personal domain name?

  (Yes, 10 pts; a free website, 5 pts; only social media profiles, 0 pts)

- Are their social media profiles fully filled out?

  (Yes, 10 pts; sparse, 5 pts; the bare minimum, 0 pts)

- Do they list at least several of the books they've edited in some manner?

  (Yes, 10 pts; no, 0 pts)

- Do they list quotes from happy, satisfied customers (aka testimonials)?

  (Yes, 10 pts; no, 0 pts)

- Do they offer a sample edit (free or paid)?

  (Yes, 10 pts; no, 0 pts)

- Run an internet search with their name or company name plus the words "scam," "problems," or "review." Do you find any **legitimate** posts against them?

  (No, 10 pts; yes, 0 pts)

o Be aware that trolls target professionals just like they target authors, so review any complaints you find to see if they contain real information. I have a couple of troll reviews out there myself that comment on how poor my "video editing" is. I don't edit videos.

Things that probably don't matter in potential editors include (unless they are a personal requirement for you):

- What their photo looks like (or if they don't have one)
- Where they live
- Whether they have an MFA
- Whether they're a writer themselves
- Whether they have a college degree
- If they agree to speak with you on the phone or on a video platform (Skype, Zoom, etc.), or meet personally (if this is possible)

Professionals can edit perfectly well without those things, but as I said, they may be important to you.

There will be a continuation of this scoring example in the next section.

So, adding up the scoring above, or on another system you design, will narrow your list down to two or three potential editors. Next we'll move onto actually hiring an editor.

Part 2: How Do You Hire a Professional Editor?

The Sample Edit

Almost all freelance book editors offer a sample edit of your material so you can see what kinds of edits they will make to your work. They may not offer a **free** sample, but that doesn't really matter…except to your pocketbook. And if you're not willing (or can't afford) to spend $25–50 bucks to see how an editor performs, you're going to be shell-shocked when you get the estimate.

If they don't offer a sample edit at all, walk away. There's simply no telling what you're getting into. Even if they provide examples of editing they've done on other material, it does not indicate what they'll do to yours, and sharing client examples without permission is unethical.

While much of editing is following rules, a large part is subjective (up to the editor's decision and the style manual they're following). And working with an editor is as much a relationship as a business proposition—it's just as important as whether the editor can edit properly or not. If possible, send the same material to your top two or three picks. You will get to see who does what, who catches what, and whom you connect with.

If you decide you don't like someone's style and find yourself gritting your teeth every time they make a comment or an attempt a joke, then you won't work well together. Can you imagine having to wade through 200 such comments? That kind of a personal reaction will make it difficult for you to accept the editor's opinion and comments, so don't hire them

unless you can set your personal feelings aside 100 percent and just focus on the edits objectively.

If you've never worked with Word's Track Changes feature, a sample edit will allow you to experience that (and play with it) before you get back an entire MS full of it.

A professional demeanor is important in your first communications with them, as well as a reasonably quick response to your initial contact. And this works both ways! You are being evaluated as much as you are evaluating. Quality editors will not take just any job that appears in their inbox. Be polite and friendly, ask intelligent questions (not the ones already answered on their website's FAQ page), and allow time for them to respond.

Part 2 Ranking Checklist

Now that your sample has been returned, you can go forward with additional scoring on your potential editors:

- Did they respond to you in a friendly, professional manner within a reasonable time (not within 12 hours on a holiday weekend…)?
  (Yes, 10 pts; no, 0 pts)
- Did they get the sample back to you when they said they would?
  (Yes, 10 pts; no, 0 pts)
- Did they offer to answer questions about the sample?
  (Yes, 10 pts; no, 0 pts)

- Did they insert comments in the sample that explained at least some of the edits?
  (Yes, 10 pts; a couple, 5 pts; no, 0 pts)
- Do you think their response style is compatible with your temperament?
  (Yes, 10 pts; no, 0 pts)
- Have they given you an estimate on the full project (provided you gave them the information they need to create an estimate: word count, page count, etc.)?
  (Yes, 10 pts; no, 0 pts)
- Did they tell you when they would be able to start editing?
  (Yes, 10 pts; no, 0 pts)
- Did they mention a contract of any sort?
  (Yes, 10 pts; no, 5 pts)
  - o Not all editors use a formal contract, so don't be excessively worried if they don't have one. A simple email or document explaining who will do what, when, and for how much can be sufficient and considered a "contract."
- Did they offer any options as to what kind of editing they will agree do on your material?
  (Yes, 10 pts; no, 0 pts)
- Did they explain (either personally or through their website) what you get with your edit: number of submissions, level of editing, etc.?
  (Yes, 10 pts; no, 0 pts)
- Did they insist you need their highest-priced package but the sample edit doesn't contain enough edits to back up the need?
  (Yes, 0 pts; no, 10 pts)

- Did they offer to help you with Track Changes if you're not familiar with it?
  (Yes, 10 pts; no, 0 pts)
- Will they provide names of references you can contact, in addition to what is on their website?
  (Yes, 10 pts; no, 0 pts)

If the editor you choose is not available right away, a smart author will take the edits and comments in all the samples under careful review and apply them to their manuscript while waiting!

If you think you learned a ton from the samples and believe you can improve your manuscript enough to move down to a lower level of editing, or a lower rate, you could ask to submit another **short** sample at a later date for the editor to reevaluate.

Part 3: How Do You Work With a Professional Editor?

If you agreed to submit your manuscript on a certain date, stick to your agreement. Editors' schedules are crowded and frequently overlap. If your manuscript is 10 days late, it will wreak havoc on their calendar, and you may lose a nonrefundable deposit and your editing slot.

Wreaking havoc on an editor's schedule is always a bad idea.

There isn't a lot for an author to do while the editor has the manuscript and is working on it. Either write something different, or write the blurb, the synopsis, or the query letter, or work on marketing. Resist the urge to

email them every other day to "see how things are going." If they feel pressured and uncomfortable, they may try to rush just to satisfy you.

Rushing an editor is always a bad idea.

Make your agreed-upon payments promptly, whether before editing begins, while editing is going on, or afterward. You looked for and hired a professional editor, and they are running a business. Businesses run on money, so stick to the payment schedule.

Financially stressing an editor is always a bad idea.

When your manuscript is returned, ask the editor if they have any suggestions about how to approach the project. Frequently an editor will return two copies: a marked-up copy (which may be a PDF) and a "clean" copy with all changes accepted. Dealing with Track Changes can be a struggle for inexperienced writers, so starting with that clean copy is best for reducing the possibility of introducing errors.

For instance, if the editor deleted "who" and replaced it with "whom" and you accept the deletion and reject the insertion, there will be a missing word—an error. When the editor accepts all the changes, you get to start with a fresh, brand-new manuscript with very few, if any, errors.

Publishing an "edited" book with new errors is always a bad idea.

If you are very comfortable with Track Changes and want the option of accepting or rejecting each individual edit, the editor can and should provide a tracked Word document.

If there is to be a second submission of your manuscript to the editor (for a proofread), some editors lock the document so you cannot actually accept or reject any edit—only comment on the ones you don't want—and

you cannot turn Track Changes off. This is done to reduce the possibility of introducing errors, to speed up the amount of time you have the document (because you are restricted as to what you can do with it), and to prevent you from adding new material…like a whole new Chapter 5 that throws off everything that was just edited.

Making an editor freak out is always a bad idea.

Many times editors are happy to review back-cover blurbs, query letters, synopses, and other short material for paying customers at no extra charge. But don't expect them to work for free forever.

Expecting a bottomless well of additional editing is always a bad idea.

Bonus Section: What If There Are Problems With the Edit?

What if I don't like the work they did?

If you mean you hate every edit they made, that should've come up in the sample and been addressed then. It's a little late now to decide you don't like how they work! If the work was performed as agreed, they are entitled to be paid for their time and effort.

What if my best friend's mother's aunt who's an English teacher says they did a bad job?

As I said before, some of editing is very subjective (meaning there is no specific rule to implement, or the situation requires the editor to adjust a rule). Your best friend, her mother, and the mother's English teacher aunt

are not qualified to judge the editing, especially on subjective matters (if PM or p.m. for time of day was implemented, for example). An English teacher may be an expert on English, but the editor is an expert on current English trends as well as style.

The editor will probably be happy to explain **some** of their decisions, or has provided a style sheet that explains them, but they're not going to clarify every single edit they made. You paid for their professional work and opinion.

That said, you do not have to accept every edit or decision your editor made. It is, after all, your book. You have the right to decide. It might be a good idea, though, to consider their experience and training (What are your qualifications?) before throwing something out the window. And you have the right to ask reasonable, polite questions.

What if I find a true error?

There is no such thing as a perfect book. You could have 50 copyeditors work on your book and the proofreader would almost definitely find **something** to change. If you find an error, fix it. It will take more time to return it to the editor than to just do it yourself. Yes, that's what you paid them to do, but as I said, there is no such thing as a perfect book.

I'm not a math expert, but I know that material being 95 percent free of errors is considered a good standard. In a 100k-word book that has 10,000 revisions, finding one remaining error is an infinitesimal percentage. Even if you found ten errors, the percentage would still be very low.

No, the editor will probably not agree to reedit your book for free unless you find a lot of obvious errors. And if they truly left a lot of obvious errors

(check whether they returned the wrong file to you by mistake), do you want them anywhere near your book again? Unfortunately, the best thing to do in such a case is try to negotiate a refund of some kind and find another editor.

What if the editor asks for a recommendation/testimonial and I don't want to write one for them?

Just tell them no, politely, and why. A professional isn't going to argue with you, and they will appreciate knowing about any issues that they can improve on for the future.

What if my book reviews say my book needs editing, and it already was edited?

If readers can point to specific examples, that's one thing. But keep in mind that many troll reviews use "lack of editing" as an excuse to rate the book poorly. One author returned to me because a reviewer said a certain word was used incorrectly. I checked… and the word didn't even exist in the manuscript! Also consider that you may have inadvertently introduced a new error after editing, especially if you reworked or added material, or moved things around.

CONGRATULATIONS ON FINISHING YOUR BOOK! NOW GET OUT THERE AND FIND A PROFESSIONAL EDITOR WHO CAN POLISH IT UP AND MAKE IT SHINE.