

So You Want to Be an Editor: Important Must-Knows about Types of Editing and What an Editor Really Does

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Lindsay Flanagan: Hi and welcome to, “So You Want to Be an Editor: Important Must-Knows about Types of Editing and What an Editor Really Does,” presented by editors from the award winning Eschler Editing team. I’m Lindsay Flanagan, and this information was also put together by Michele Preisendorf.

I’m going to share my screen with you so you can see the presentation, and then we’ll get started.

Okay, so what we’re covering today are the different types of editing, which are developmental, substantive, copy editing, and proofreading, along with post-design quality control.

But before we go into them, let’s talk really quickly about the different editing terms. There can be a lot of confusion between the different types of editing, for example, developmental and substantive editing, and line and copy editing.

You may hear all of these different terms and some of them may be used interchangeably and confusingly, like line edit versus copy edit. So how do you know what type of editing you’re actually supposed to be doing? You’ll first need to be familiar with the skills needed for each type of editing and you’ll want to be flexible with the definitions, and also with the manuscript you look at in terms of how well they fit in the defined editing boxes.

Depending on whether it’s a book or an article, and which genre it is, and whether it’s for a traditional publisher or self-publishing author, or whether the author is experienced or not, would

dictate where you draw the definition lines in your own editing career and with each individual book.

So as I said, we're going to go through all the different phases of the types of editing. We're also going to look at the temperament and skills needed for each type of editing.

We're going to give you suggestions for learning how to become that type of editor. We'll also show you how to evaluate a manuscript for determining the type and level of editing needed. Then we'll give you some insight about editing resources and tools.

So developmental editing is big picture feedback; we're addressing content issues that are essential to producing a high quality, marketable product.

So with the big picture feedback, we're asking what's working, what's not working, and then we're going to address the book's organization and structure.

The editor will address how the book's content is organized and structured, and how a book's story is structured and presented. That's the difference between fiction and nonfiction.

We're also going to look at the book's theme and at the message. Fiction and memoir should have a theme or a lesson to be learned, and nonfiction should have a message and solutions. We're also looking at the marketing angle and high concept.

The marketing angle is the number one element of nonfiction to consider, as the author wants to get it published.

The way the author approaches the subject can either draw readers in or push them away. In both fiction and nonfiction, a book that is high concept means it's a fresh exploration of an idea or concept that hasn't been quite done or seen before.

In developmental editing fiction and memoir, the focus is going to be on the overall story. When you're editing a manuscript to develop it into a book that actually works, you should be addressing all of the items that we're going to discuss, and more if you see them. And if you studied writing, you'll be very familiar with many of these terms. A hook can be many things.

It's the core external plot that you'll find on the book's back cover or the key unique idea or element of the story that would be used in an elevator pitch.

And these two things can be part of the high concept appeal. It can also mean the opening couple pages of the book, which is about how many pages readers, agents, and editors are going to peruse before making a decision on whether to buy it, read further, or pass. A book's opening, the first line or the first couple paragraphs or pages, should grab the reader, and hook them, and never let them go.

The next thing you'll look at is the book's inciting incident, which is what sets the story in motion, and what sends the main character on his or her journey. It's a trigger that sets the protagonist into action.

For me, the biggest thing that I look at is story structure. If a manuscript isn't following any type of story structure, then it's merely a sequence of events that leads to nothing. Structure is how a story is presented.

It's nonlinear and then it can be told in flashbacks, flash forwards via parallel timelines, and using effect and cause, all which helps to drive tension and suspense.

It differs from plot, because plot is what is happening in the story. It's the story's events and all the twists and turns and evil master plans and how a hero resolves it.

The pacing of the story is the speed and rhythm in which the story events are told. You want to question everything in the story and ask if they matter.

What this means is, are they moving the plot forward or helping with character development? Does setting help create a mood or tone for the story? And then you need to be sure that the events that do matter, don't drag on.

A developmental editor also looks at point of view, which is the narrator's position in the description of events. As an editor, one of your jobs is to ensure that the author hasn't headhopped and switched character viewpoints.

We also look at dialogue, which is the speech of fiction—the talk between two or more characters. It should work for, not against, the fiction and the story.

Good dialogue draws the reader into an imaginary world and works to keep them there. A lot of writers fall into telling through dialogue and that feels contrived and we know it's only being said for the audience's sake.

You'll look at setting which is time, place, and location of the story's events. It should help create the mood of the story and should be consistent with the characters' behaviors, opinions, and attitudes. Setting works best when it's layered into the story and shown, not told.

Characterization is a literary device that teaches the reader about the character, which will explain their behaviors as they work toward achieving the story's goal.

We mentioned suspense and tension above with pacing. It's built in many different ways, but it should always be there; the character should try, and fail, and have false successes, many times before achieving their goal, and all of the story's events again should be pushing the plot forward.

We've mentioned high concept, but we also look at audience and genre awareness.

Writers should know their audience and be aware of genre conventions. For example, if the author says the book is middle grade but features an adult protagonist, this goes against the middle grade audience and category because kids want to read about kids, not adults.

A developmental editor can help an author increase the book's marketability. This has to do with understanding market breakdowns and also understanding the psychology and the emotions of readers. I will talk about this a little bit more, especially in our nonfiction section.

So a nonfiction developmental editor will focus on the overall message and power of the book's argument.

You'll be looking for the book's readability. The manuscript should use appropriate language and ideas for the target audience. For example, if the author is writing to business beginners, they should keep in mind their level of business knowledge and teach the content by using layman's terms and defining key points and words.

You'll look at the book's logic. The ideas that are meant to support the thesis, message, or argument should clearly and easily tie back to it without resorting to illogical or unbelievable connections.

You want to address the book's cohesiveness of ideas. So, similar to logic, the ideas and solutions that the manuscript is trying to solve should connect together logically and also relate and build upon each other.

Additionally, a book's organization is something that you need to address. So it should be organized in a way that, again, builds up logically to a resolution. So for example, if a solution to eating healthier meals is to cook nutritious meals. . .

I said that example, a little bit backwards. For example, if a solution to healthier eating is to cook nutritious meals, then a solution, previous to it, would be a step-by-step guide to shopping for healthy ingredients. I thought that would be an easy example to say but came across really bad.

So let me say it just one more time. If a solution in a nonfiction self-help book is about eating healthier, then one of the solutions is to cook nutritious meals.

But a solution previously to that would be a step-by-step guide to shopping for healthy ingredients, because without healthy ingredients, you can't cook a good nutritious meal. So that's what a developmental editor is looking for as far as organization and cohesiveness of ideas.

The editor will then address general rhetorical issues. This is referencing ethos, which is someone's character or guiding beliefs; or pathos, which is sympathy for another situation; and logos, which is reason. So in nonfiction, this has to do with how compelling an argument is.

For example, if the author is inadvertently job-shaming, like saying how his son isn't working hard in school, so he's going to tell him about how, you know, you don't want to end up like the people at Walmart, then the author is inadvertently coming across as a snob, or someone who undervalues other people's contributions to society. So that would be an ethos-pathos as issue of understanding and connecting to the reader.

Logos would be the logic, organization, and the transitions between sentences, paragraphs, and ideas, where the author is trying to make a point, but sometimes it's just not nailing it and the ideas are not coming together in a way that the reader is getting or that would seem very powerful.

We talked about unique angle, but this is the very unique or different approach to a problem that hasn't been done before.

And as far as market and audience awareness, for nonfiction, it's similar to fiction and memoir, and that it has to do with understanding market breakdowns and understanding the psychology and the emotions of readers.

But it's also about understanding the psychology that goes into good rhetoric. If the author doesn't understand what the reader is actually going through, then the content isn't going to support them with the right examples and tools, or even answering the questions that inspired the reader to pick up the book in the first place.

So for example, if the author just shares a bunch of nice stories, but then doesn't spell out for the reader what the tools are and how to apply that in their lives, then the writer and the content are not meeting the needs of the audience.

Substantive editing is also addressing content. It's precise attention, again, to those issues that are essential to producing a high-quality marketable product, but this is on a page-by-page and sometimes paragraph-by-paragraph level.

So a substantive editor is going to ensure that the big picture has been addressed in the author revision stage after developmental editing.

It's going to be page-by-page feedback and editing, which may involve things like cutting and pasting content, reorganizing paragraphs or scenes, writing transition sentences, and tying content to a thesis and motive.

Line editing can be included as part of a substantive edit if the content is in good enough shape that it wouldn't need to be cut or completely revised. And we'll discuss line editing in a minute.

All of these bullet points are things that you'll want to address as a substantive editor for fiction and memoir, and we already talked a lot about a lot of them already. So we'll only touch on a few of these.

First, we're going to talk about word count. And why would we want to cut it. This relates to genre awareness. Genres have specific guidelines and expectations that were not only established by books already on the shelf, but by publishers and readers, too. A 100,000 word middle-grade novel is not going to fly with readers and no publisher will pick it up.

Cutting word count also relates to prose execution. If you can say, or write, something in five words instead of ten, that's better because it's straight to the point and more clear. Prose execution has to do with line editing and we'll talk about that in a minute.

So with an author's style and voice, you need to keep in mind that as an editor, your job is to make the book better, but not at the expense of the author's style and voice.

An editor is a behind-the-scenes member of the author's team, so rewriting their book isn't going to accomplish anything but having someone else get credit for a book you wrote with their ideas.

Style and voice are two different things. Style relates to the author's words, the syntax they choose and reject, the way they compose their sentences, and the order in which they string the sentences together.

The audience which the author is writing to helps determine the style. Like, for example, a gun slinging Western will likely have a much different style than a YA vampire romance.

Voice, on the other hand, is the unique point of view through which the author sees the world. For example, the author through their narrator might frame everything from a skeptical or cynical point of view.

Or they might see everything through a lens of hopefulness, a viewpoint that will come out in the narration expressed, of course, in the style (the words and the word relationships they choose).

A book's ending shouldn't be improbable or be seen or known from the beginning. It should, however, answer the central question that was raised in the beginning of the book.

Will Romeo and Juliet get together? Who was the murderer? Did our dystopian heroin overthrow the government? It should leave the reader feeling hopeful and have some sort of sense of completion, even if the ending is ambiguous.

It should be fresh, surprising, or done in a surprising way, and make sure all the loose ends from the main plot and subplots have been tied up, and that the arcs have been completed.

And finally, editing for world creation is to ensure it's logical, feasible, and adheres to rules established by the author themselves.

For example, magic can't just be conjured out of thin air, or if it can, how and why can it. Political systems need to make sense. They can be based on real governments, as long as the characters behave appropriately within them.

Substantive editing for nonfiction, again, we've talked about a lot of these, but let's talk about market and audience awareness and what that means as you edit nonfiction.

Basically you're looking to see if the content, which are the stories, the anecdotes, the questions, and the answers and solutions, are going to be relatable to the reader and are going to provide them with what they were looking for when they picked up the book in the first place.

So, understanding what kind of reader is going to be reading the book affects how the author writes it in terms of length, organization, and the word choice that the author uses.

That also affects the rhetorical approach they use. The author's understanding of their audience also includes audience sensitivity, like we discussed with the Walmart example earlier.

Understanding the marketing angle and how deep or wide it needs to go is a huge part of assessing nonfiction. For example, an author will need to review the content and see if the author has considered their audience. I think I said that incorrectly. An editor will need to review the content and see if the author has considered their audience, if they decided to go deep with all kinds of scientific facts or whether they just stated their opinion and moved on. So in a financial book, a really educated, discerning audience would be reading for different reasons than someone who just wants to know how to balance their checkbook.

In a book to help single mothers, the author would need to determine who they are addressing; is it divorced mothers or widowed mothers, because their struggles are going to be slightly different. So the author needs to tackle those differences in their book, rather than lumping them all together with a one-size-fits-all solution.

So now we'll move on to deep line editing, which is usually included as part of substantive editing and its main goal is to address the artistry and emotional impact of the prose.

The overall goal of the line edit is to address the way the writer is using the language and writes it to tell their story.

So an editor will ask, "Is the language clear and correct? Does it convey a sense of atmosphere, emotion, and tone? And do the words the writer has chosen convey the story's meaning or the work's message?" You'll notice some new bullet points up here as well as some we've talked about before, specifically in the nonfiction section.

As we talked about in the beginning of the presentation, the different types of editing tend to overlap. So even if you're just editing for prose to make sure the message is clear, you're also considering the big picture, making sure the content being presented is accurate, organized, and clear.

So let's talk about the items in the first column. An editor can help a writer cut down on wordiness by using interesting and more precise words that could eliminate the need for articles. They can also look for small groups of sentences and consolidate information by combining descriptions and deleting anything that is implied by context or involves the reader's ability to infer.

A line editor will watch for redundancy, which is information that has already been said, and repetition, which is overuse of a particular word or phrase.

Powerful words stay with the reader and writers who are skilled will know that strong verbs and nouns are more powerful than the crutches known as adjectives and adverbs, but not always. Sometimes they work well.

Keep in mind that an author's background informs their word choices and similarly the character's background should inform their words, too.

Maxing out the value of words means to use the words in descriptions or dialect sections to simultaneously cover character thoughts and emotions, and any parts where it is difficult not to slip into the dreaded telling. Description and dialogue can be a vehicle for character development, relationships, tension, and other plot or story devices.

The rhythm of sentences effects its readability. Three similar sounding sentences in a row become monotone. Editors can help writers vary their sentence lengths, help revise for clarity, and remove awkward phrasing. Editors should ask if the sentences achieved the desired effect.

Showing versus telling is a big one that many writers are told, you have to show, not tell. What that really means is that you need to watch for telling issues that don't add to the story, such as non-interesting outfits where people are wearing jeans and a blue t-shirt, or descriptions of regular everyday outdoor scenes.

Basically, readers are going to automatically imagine a boring outfit, because they're bringing their everyday experience into their reading so they can already imagine a boring outfit or a mundane doctor's office.

Line editors want to address figurative language and two of the most common tools writers use for imagery are metaphors and similes.

A metaphor is a symbol, a way of mixing two unlike things to create new meaning. It should reveal something about the idea, emotion, or scene at hand, not obscure it.

Similes are like the metaphor in purpose, but allow writers to use broader strokes. A simile can do double duty, setting the scene and the tone, while also allowing the writer to suggest a comparison without being too on-the-nose with their symbolism.

A good simile should draw an emotional connection between the idea they're wanting to express and the image used.

And finally, a line editor wants to address purple prose. Prose shouldn't draw attention to itself. Purple prose is what happens when it is more noticeable than the story, when the writing is clearly overdone.

The problem isn't with purple prose itself, because there are times when writing calls for it, but with patches of purple prose cropping up in an otherwise normal story.

So once content and prints execution have been squared away. grammar, spelling, punctuation, and consistency issues need checked and polished. These are critical steps on the track to finishing a book or a project.

A skilled copy editor will catch about 100 to 300 errors, per every 100 pages, or even as many as 5,000 to 10,000. The numbers tend to be higher when the authors wish to self-publish, but—and you should inform your clients of this—it's usually on the lower end if they've had a real substantive edit because substantive editors probably will catch a lot of those things as they're editing for things like pacing and story and prose.

So a copy editor ensures that the prose is clear and accurate and that the structure of each sentence is solid.

Again, there's a little bit of overlap there with line editing, but this involves things like making sure there are no misplaced modifiers. For example, in the sentence "Dodging into the darkness of the forest, the ax was held above Sir Lancelot's head." Obviously the ax isn't doing the dodging, so this sentence would be corrected as "Dodging into the darkness of the forest, Sir

Lancelot held the ax above his head.” A copy editor is going to tighten wordy prose, smooth awkward transitions, and make sure point of view stays consistent.

They’ll also address any issues that are related to grammar, spelling, and punctuation, which also includes things like hyphenation, typos, proper capitalization, and small inconsistencies or style within the narrative.

They also check the ordering of chapters; they’re going to format sources according to indicated style guides, and review all front and back matter, which consists of things like table of contents, the dedication, the preface, the forward acknowledgments, call to action, reference section, and appendices.

It’s always best practice to have a set , a different set of eyes for the proofread, because the eye can play tricks and a proofreader will see things the copy editor may have missed, especially when the copy edit has been on the heavy side.

It’s always wise for an author to get a follow up proofread to catch those. They’re going to double check things like punctuation, grammar, spelling, type of style guide consistency, and capitalization.

Post-design quality control is what’s known as a galley proofread and it includes reviewing a manuscript for visual consistency issues once it’s been typeset and just before printing.

The goal with galley proofreading is to making sure everything on the page lends to make the reader experience as enjoyable and as easy on the eyes as possible.

So it reviews things like running heads, which are the headings at the top of pages; reviews page numbers, spelling in chapter heads and table of contents, drop cap placement, end-of-line word breaks and stacks, line spacing, kerning and tracking, widows and orphans, but it doesn’t include word-by-word proofreading or handling footnotes and graphics.

So you want to make sure that you inform your client that they need to make sure they’ve had proofreading and copy editing done after their substantive edit, before the post-design quality control stage. And it looks like I forgot to click on my bullets here while I talked about all of these.

Now we’ll move into what kind of skills are needed to become each type of editor. For developmental and substantive editing, an editor is going to need a strong sense of what makes

the story or narrative work. They need to be well-read in contemporary works and the genres they want to edit.

The ability to write well, as ghostwriting is often part of the edit is important, as is the ability to balance honesty and diplomacy; you want your authors to trust you. So you need to be honest with them and tell them what's not working, while also giving them the tools to make it work.

You need to be able to juggle many responsibilities, as generally you'll have more than one client or project at a time.

You need to have the ability to meet deadlines. This is important in all fields, I think. But if you promise a writer that you'll return their baby to them at a certain time, you need to show you're able to meet those deadlines, not only because it's the professional thing to do, but because authors are an anxious lot and they want to know how their art is received.

You need to be able to work under pressure. Deadlines aren't the only pressure. Sometimes you really need to dig down deep to find something an author is doing well, and that is a lot of pressure. And you need to love to read, and that goes without saying.

For deep line editing, you need to be able to gauge the tone of a work and edit sentences to invoke that tone while, again remaining in the author's style and voice. You should be skillful in artistic and creative writing to tighten sentences for clarity, and for artistry.

You should have the ability to organize content on a line-by-line basis, so the author's message and intent is clear. This takes skillful writing so that the sentences transition and build on each other to clarify and enhance meaning.

You should be knowledgeable in figurative language and how to use it effectively, so as to avoid clichés. And you need to be able to deliver constructive criticism and feedback.

This is how to become a developmental or substantive editor. You can see on the slide here that you should do things like earn a bachelor's degree, complete internships, familiarize yourself with the writing world, and read a lot.

I specialized in developmental and substantive editing. I earned my BA in English, then I spent over a decade working in higher education, but I always knew my true love was with the written word.

So I started attending writing conferences, which is where I met Angela Eschler, the founder and editor-in-chief of Eschler editing.

Three years after I met her, I was nearing the end of the master's program and needed an internship. So I reached out to her to see if she was willing to take on an intern. Thankfully, she was, and after six months interning, I became a freelance editor and her administrative assistant.

It's now been nearly six years and I am now the editing project manager, in addition to editing. I'm also freelance editor for two publishers, have completed an internship with a New York based literary agency, and I'm currently being mentored by a kid lit agent. I'm still learning, still keeping tabs on the editing and publishing world by subscribing to industry related newsletters, and attending conferences, and reading a lot of books on writing and editing.

And here, a copy editor and proofreader again has a university level education; has an in-depth knowledge of whatever style manual is being used, such as Chicago, MLA, or APA; Michele says you have to be obsessed with detail, accuracy, and ensuring the prose reads beautifully; respects an author's style and voice; uses diplomacy when providing feedback to the author; and is able to meet deadline and work under pressure.

So we've got the same sort of tips here: go to school; start out by completing internships; read a lot. Michele's specialty is copy editing and proofreading.

After earning her BA in English from BYU, she began doing evaluations, copy editing, and proofreading for Covenant Communications.

This is where she met Angela Eschler, who was a senior editor with Covenant. When Angela decided to start her own editing business, she asked Michele to join her in growing that business. She continued to edit for local publishing houses for a number of years, but as Eschler Editing began to pick up steam, she decided that that was where she wanted to concentrate her efforts.

Her almost 20 years of experience working with these publishing houses and various authors, and studying the various style manuals, has been invaluable. Michele now manages the copy editing-proofreading department at Eschler, where she vets editors who are interested in freelancing with Eschler and helps authors find editors who are a good match.

So once you are that editor, you'll need to know how to evaluate the manuscripts. So for fiction and nonfiction, you'll want to figure out, does it need developmental editing or is it ready for substantive editing. So ask the author, "Has the manuscript been beta read, or had a developmental edit?" You'll want to look over it and see if the quality of writing is high so it's easily readable, and check the word count, to see if it's within the genre's guidelines. For fiction, does the book open with the hook and by skimming, can you identify the inciting incident? Can you identify the main character, a flaw or a goal? By skimming, can you identify the story structure, plot, and pacing? For nonfiction, you want to see if the book opens with the introduction of a unique thesis, message, or argument. You want to know if the book is organized in readable sections that identify problems to be solved and solutions for those problems.

Does the author seem to understand their target audience? So for both of these, fiction and nonfiction, developmental and substantive editing, you'll want to do some sample. . .

sample edits for your own benefit, but also for the author's. You want to see how much work the book is going to need. And if it's strictly developmental or if it's straddling the line between developmental and substantive, or if it's ready to go to substantive. And then for the author, they'll want to see your editing style and how you're approaching their work.

For copy editing if the content is solid, it's possibly ready, to do some copy editing. So you should do some sample edits as well; take two or three pages from the beginning, the middle and the end and edit them, carefully tracking how much time it takes you to edit those pages.

Some editors like to base their bids on word count and then adjust according to how long it takes them to do ten pages. That way they come close to what they want to make hourly.

In all cases, be sure to let the author know what they can expect from you, what your edit includes, and what it does not, so there's no confusion down the line.

Finally, we have some resources for you to start studying, if you want to be an editor, which hopefully you do, since you're attending this session, but we'll give you about ten seconds to screenshot these slides here.

On this slide, this is for developmental and substantive editing. My favorites are "Save the Cat Writes a Novel" by Jessica Brody and "Hooked: Write Fiction that Grabs Readers at Page One and Never Lets Them Go" by Les Edgerton.

This is specifically for nonfiction. I should clarify. This slide is for fiction and memoir. This slide is for nonfiction.

And again, we'll give you about ten seconds to screenshot this.

And here are some resources for line editing. My favorite on this list is "The First Five Pages: A Writer's Guide to Staying Out of the Rejection Pile" by Noah Lukeman. It is also listed on that first slide for developmental and substantive editing.

And for copy editing and proofreading, the things you need to be studying are the style manuals, such as Chicago Manual of Style. It's probably the most widely used style guide in the world.

And Michele points out that you should familiarize yourself with sections two, and six through fourteen. You can get it online with a subscription.

Merriam-Webster's online dictionary. I have it on my phone and also bookmarked.

And then if you're going to edit in other style guides, you'll want to be aware of them: APA, AP (which is mainly used by journalists), and MLA.

And thank you for attending. If you want more information, you can always visit us at eschlerediting.com and you can also sign up for free resources.