



## NONFICTION EDITING 201

Instructor: Erin K. Brown

### Lesson #2

#### Miscellaneous Tasks

Welcome to Lesson 2. This lesson includes a bit more “housekeeping” items to take care of before we dive deeper into the levels and specialized fields of nonfiction editing.

#### Manuscript Evaluation

Though manuscript evaluations can be as short as a few paragraphs, they can be as long and comprehensive as fifteen to twenty pages. It all depends on what your client is looking for.

For our purposes, a manuscript evaluation determines the level of edit the manuscript requires, whether it is ready for submission, and what the manuscript requires to make it the best it can be. Whether bidding on a project or doing a substantive edit, you will need to offer some level of evaluation of the manuscript—your assessment of the manuscript’s strengths, weaknesses, and more. You may wonder how long the evaluation should be, what details to include, and the amount and type of advice to offer your client or prospective client. While I can’t give you a definitive answer that covers all situations, I can offer some suggestions that have worked for me in my twenty-plus years of professional editing.

When bidding on an editing project and before doing a critique, I ask the author the following questions:

- Who is your target audience?
- What is your manuscript’s theme?
- What do you want your readers to take away after reading your book?
- Will you seek traditional publishing or self-publishing?
- Do you want me to look for anything specific while working on your manuscript (any areas you struggled with, treatment of sensitive topics, organization, etc.)?

When doing a full manuscript evaluation, I address all of the above items, as well as consider the potential of the manuscript and what it will take to achieve that. I also comment on the following (if doing only a bid, I comment on just some of these items):

- Author’s apparent knowledge of the topic
- Writing style

- Tone
- Pacing
- Use of illustrations, similes, and metaphors
- Condition of the introduction
- Is the beginning the best place to start?
- Does it end where/as it should?
- Chapter-ending hooks
- Is the writing of high, lasting quality?
- Is the message timely?
- Does the author respect the readers?
- Suggestions for improvements

The form of your evaluation can be a spreadsheet/checklist in conjunction with a written report of your findings.

Think of yourself as coming alongside your client and partnering with him or her to create the best possible manuscript. Your client will appreciate you and your expertise, and you will be satisfied with having done your best job while helping him or her on the road to publication.

## Style Sheets

A style sheet is a record of treatment of terms, names, abbreviations, places, events, capitalization, punctuation, etc., that is particular to a manuscript. It ensures consistency throughout the manuscript and is used in conjunction with the house style (if applicable) and the appropriate style manual(s). It follows the manuscript throughout the publishing process. Some style sheets are pages long. They typically include the following:

- book title and author
- editor and contact information
- resources used to determine the style
- publication information (if applicable)
- places
- buildings
- businesses
- organizations
- trademarks
- occupations
- style decisions (e.g., a.m., AM, or AM)
- treatment of numerals
- head and subhead style
- uncommon style, spelling, hyphenation, or capitalization
- particular punctuation or diacritics
- extracts, sidebars, graphics

Don't ever think you can skip creating a style sheet. If the little devil sitting on your left shoulder says, "You can remember these few names. Don't waste your time with a style sheet," knock the bugger off, pull up your style sheet template, and get at it! I guarantee that you cannot remember the treatment of everything on the above list.

### *Creating the Style Sheet*

I use a combination of a Word document and a spreadsheet. I create a spreadsheet with a list of all the terms, separate them into categories, and automatically alphabetize them. I cut and paste the spreadsheet onto my Word document/template. Set up your template however works best for you. Following is my style sheet template.



[www.WriteEditor.net](http://www.WriteEditor.net)    [thewriteeditor@gmail.com](mailto:thewriteeditor@gmail.com)

Title:

Author:

References used: *Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th Edition

*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th Edition

Codes: CN=chapter number; CT=chapter title; BQ=block quotation;  
PO=poem; FM=front-matter head; EXT=extract; NL=numbered list;  
BL=bulleted list

Style: Serial comma

Numerals one through one hundred spelled out, but numerals for percentages  
(25 percent)

Small caps for AM and PM, signs, text messages

Capitalize deity pronouns

Subheads: H1 **Upper/Lowercase, Bold**

H2 *Upper/Lowercase, Bold Italics*

H3 **CAPS/SMALL CAPS, BOLD**

H4 **Run in with text, bold, initial cap only, followed by a period.**

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[insert spreadsheet of terms]

\* \* \*

Though my style sheet template is short, it saves me about ten minutes of work because it includes the basics I use in most manuscripts I edit. I'm all about saving time and work!

Once I'm done adding all the necessary information to this template, I cut the alphabetized lists from my spreadsheet template and paste them onto the end of this template.

*ALWAYS* review and proofread your style sheet before sending it to your client at the completion of the manuscript edit. Did you notice that I used bold, italic, and small caps on the word *always*? That's because I really, truly mean it. Whenever you communicate with clients, proofread your work.

## Tables and Charts

Nonfiction Editing 101 went into some detail about the types of tables to use for particular information. If you didn't take that course, this website is a good guide:

[https://nces.ed.gov/nceskids/help/user\\_guide/graph/whentouse.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/nceskids/help/user_guide/graph/whentouse.asp).

For our purposes, we are concerned with editing the content of tables. Tables use columns and rows that present information in a sequential manner. We read down columns and across rows, comparing one bit of information with another. Tables are best used when

- comparing individual values;
- presenting precise values; and
- applying multiple units of measures.

Rows (horizontal) and columns (vertical) comprise tables, as do titles, heads, subheads, and data. Typically, two sets of variables are presented in tables.

Follow this list while editing tables. You may have to make several passes because you must look for several things.<sup>1</sup>

- The table has to make sense. It should stand on its own without any explanation from the text.
- The table must be relevant to the text.
- Table content must not conflict with the text.
- Check for any inconsistencies between the text and table.
- The table should be near the relative text.
- Check that all tables within the manuscript are formatted consistently.
- Table number should match the reference in the text (i.e., "See Table 2.1" in the text refers to the table labeled Table 2.1).
- All spelling is correct.
- Make sure math content is correct. (You are not responsible for accuracy in statistics or numbers used, only that any math is correct. If it is not, bring it to the author's/project manager's [PM] attention.)
- Sources should be correctly marked and formatted.
- The legend must match the variables.

If you discover that the content of a table can be clearly stated with the desired effect in just a sentence, then certainly point it out to the author's/PM's attention. And if textual material could be better presented in a table, mark the text to be converted into a table and add your comment. Applied well, charts are far more efficient in conveying a massive amount of information in a small, easy-to-read format.

## Sequential Numbering

Most nonfiction manuscripts contain some form of sequential numbering: TOC (table of contents), endnotes/footnotes, bibliography, numbered lists, questions, action steps, and exercises.

Before editing, I print out the TOC (if one has been created), list of illustrations (if applicable), and any endnotes and bibliographies. As I move through the manuscript, I check the titles on the printed TOC against the chapter titles in the manuscript. You'd be surprised how many times the TOC and chapter titles do not match. If your client has failed to include a chapter title in the TOC, you'll want to add it. If you find a discrepancy in the title, query the author on both the TOC and the chapter title, asking which title is correct. Ultimately, the TOC and chapter titles must match—in order, exact wording, capitalization, and punctuation.

You'll follow a similar procedure as you compare the graphics against any list of illustrations or other lists provided at the beginning of the book.

In the same way, confirm that the superscript reference numbers after quotations match the same-numbered note in the endnotes or footnotes. It's beneficial to jot the page number of the quoted material next to the documentation in endnotes. This helps if you have to find the keyed material for any reason. Also, ensure that the reference numbers are sequential and that the note material matches the keyed material in the text. If the text refers to John Smith's work on cattle ranching but the note gives information from Alex Johnson's book about haying equipment, you'll need to address the discrepancy in some way—either you'll be able to figure it out from context, or you'll need to query the author/PM about the problem.

If the manuscript contains numbered questions, points, or any numbered elements, make sure the numbers are sequential with no gaps in numbering. In addition, make sure numbered lists are parallel in structure (this applies to bulleted lists and unnumbered lists, too).

If the chapter closes with questions, exercises, action steps, or a numbered summary of the chapter, edit these for parallelism (where applicable) and appropriateness—the items must pertain to what the chapter talked about. If the chapter is about how to set goals, but the questions or action steps are about strategies to reach goals, check to see if there's a chapter on strategies to reach goals, where these items belong. Maybe the author rearranged some chapters and the matching material was left in the original location. If that's the case, move the items. But if you can't locate where the material belongs or where the items for the chapter are, query your client.

## Insets/Sidebars/Callouts/Extracts

Insets, sidebars, callouts, and extracts not only add interest to the reading but also create design appeal. Let's make sure we're all on the same page with these terms.

An *inset* is a relatively long discussion of a topic, perhaps a story or anecdote, that digresses from the main subject of the section but is still related. The material is set apart to avoid breaking the flow of the main text. Insets typically have a title, which is referenced in the running text: *See "Cattle in Montana Outnumber Citizens" on page XX.*

A *sidebar* is a short discussion (a fact or other noteworthy information) that is set off from the running text. It too has a title, but no cross-reference in the running text is necessary.

For added interest, the same-titled sidebar can appear in all chapters of the manuscript. For example, a book on Hollywood movies could include in each chapter a sidebar about famous movies by decade. One chapter might have the sidebar "Famous Movies of the Thirties," and the next chapter could have "Famous Movies of the Forties" and so on.

The *callout* is a significant or interesting quote pulled from the text and set apart in a different font and size. It has visual appeal that draws the reader's attention to it.

An *extract* (block quotation) is quoted material that is set off from the regular text. It can be set in a smaller font, tighter text and lines, and wider margins. When editing block quotations, I suggest keeping the same font and size as the surrounding text. The book typesetter/designer will decide if it should be in a different font from the text.

Recall our previous lesson when we talked about too-long paragraphs. Using one or more of these elements will break up pages of solid words and sentences, creating visual interest and reducing reader fatigue.

## Heads, Subheads, and Running Heads

A nonfiction manuscript can be divided into parts (or sections) and then into chapters. Each part or section usually has a number and a title, and it should contain a minimum of two chapters. The chapters are numbered consecutively from beginning to end—do not start numbering over with "1" in each part.

The head of a chapter is the number, title, and subtitle. Though it's not your job to create chapter titles, you do edit them. Some guidelines to keep in mind (house style supersedes):

- Use short titles
- Use titles that convey the chapter's content
- Use headline style
- Chapter number and title in upper/lowercase
- Watch out for prepositions (see *CMOS* 8.159 #3, but some publishers capitalize prepositions of more than four letters)

As you saw on my sample style sheet, the following is the hierarchy of subheads for many nonfiction genres:

H1 **Upper/Lowercase, Bold**

H2 **Upper/Lowercase, Bold Italics**

H3 **CAPS/SMALL CAPS, BOLD** (*Note: most e-book platforms do not support small caps*)

H4 **Run in with text, bold, initial cap only, followed by a period.**

Subheads not only create visual appeal on the page but also inform the reader about the information in the text that follows. In an informational text, subheads help readers quickly locate particular material.

As in the “rules” of outlines, each level should have at least two sections. Please remember to format the manuscript’s head and subheads to the appropriate style manual. For example, *APA* and *Turabian* are different from *CMOS*.

### *APA*

Level 1: **Bold, Centered, First Letter of Each Word Is Capitalized**

Level 2: **Bold, Flush Left, First Letter of Each Word Is Capitalized**

Level 3: **Bold, indented five spaces from the left, and followed by a period. Capitalize only the first letter of the first word and proper nouns. The first paragraph following this heading should be typed on the same line as the heading.**

Level 4: ***Bold, italics, indented five spaces from the left, and followed by a period. Capitalize only the first letter of the first word and proper nouns. The first paragraph following this heading should be typed on the same line as the heading.***

Level 5: ***Italics, indented five spaces from the left, and followed by a period. Capitalize only the first letter of the first word and proper nouns. The first paragraph following this heading should be typed on the same line as the heading.***

### *Turabian*

Level 1: **Bold, Centered, All Major Words Capitalized**

Level 2: **Centered, All Major Words Capitalized**

Level 3: **Left-justified, All Major Words Capitalized**

Running heads are located at the top of the printed page. It’s a headline running across consecutive pages. Typically, the book’s title is on verso, and the chapter title and page number on recto. I’ve had to code running heads only a couple of times in my twenty-plus years of editing, but proofreaders must check running heads on each page of the galley. If you’re editing a manuscript in a Word document, you will likely not denote running heads (unless the PM requests it).

## **Plagiarism, Libel, and Invasion of Privacy**

Here comes the typical disclaimer: I’m not a lawyer, so the following information is based on what I’ve experienced in my career. If your clients engage in plagiarism, libel, or invasion of privacy, I suggest you caution them about the implications and, if necessary, advise them to

contact a lawyer knowledgeable in these matters.

That being said, the author is ultimately responsible for accurate content, but the copyeditor must have a sense or instinct about what facts should be verified or queried, always being on the lookout for possible instances of plagiarism, libel, and invasion of privacy.

To plagiarize is to present someone else's idea or work as one's own. How can a copyeditor be expected to spot instances of plagiarism? Truly, it's not always possible, but maybe my experience will help you keep alert.

Several years ago I edited a manuscript for a major publisher I regularly work for. In the manuscript, the author talked about a study conducted by Stanford on delayed gratification in children. Nothing was quoted within the text, but I wanted to know if the author meant Stanford University. Also, as the author wrote about this study, the writing didn't "sound" like her style (this is your biggest clue that something could be off—don't ignore this red flag). So I did an internet search. Yep, Stanford University, but I also discovered that she'd copied word-for-word several pages of the report yet hadn't cited it. I found two other instances of plagiarism in her manuscript. I immediately contacted the PM. It was her job to contact the author and work out the solution. Because the copied report wasn't long, the limit on how many words she could quote before violating copyright was maybe fifty (she had quoted almost the whole report). Had I not caught the plagiarism, the author and publisher could have faced serious legal issues.

Several plagiarism checkers/detectors are available online to help with this issue.

While editing memoirs, autobiographies, and biographies, be on the alert for issues of libel and invasion of privacy. A few years ago a client contacted me about ghostwriting his autobiography. Before I agreed, he sent me a rough outline of what he wanted to include. In it he mentioned a famous (deceased) author he had dealings with as a young man. He did not speak of her in kind terms. Honestly, I was shocked. How could I be part of a project that would tarnish this person's reputation? Would I open myself up to charges of libel? The client provided reliable and well-known sources of this famous author's schemes. I checked them out and found the facts he presented to be accurate and documented in several places—and I realized this famous writer's character wasn't as sterling as I had thought. Therefore, although these things were anything but flattering to the author whose works many readers love, they were true, accurate, and a significant part of my client's life.

Whenever you edit a work that involves events or places of a sensitive nature, it may be necessary to change the names of the people. It may even be prudent to create composite people or events to protect the identity of individuals. A case in point is a book I proofread a few years back: *Fleeing ISIS, Finding Jesus: The Real Story of God at Work*. Author Charles Morris tells of the miraculous ways in which Jesus is transforming lives in the Middle East today—he calls it the golden age of Muslims coming to Christ. To convert to Christianity can be a death sentence within the Muslim culture; therefore, Morris did not use actual names in this book. In these cases, you'll see on the copyright page something like this:

Some names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

You might find the following disclaimers useful as you edit various nonfiction works:

I have tried to recreate events, locales, and conversations from my memories of them. In order to maintain their anonymity, in some instances, I have changed the names of individuals and places and/or identifying characteristics and details.

Although the author and publisher have made every effort to ensure that the information in this book was correct at press time, the author and publisher do not assume, and hereby disclaim, any liability to any party for any loss, damage, or disruption caused by errors or omissions, whether such errors or omissions result from negligence, accident, or any other cause.

This book is not intended as a substitute for the medical advice of physicians. The reader should regularly consult a physician in matters relating to his/her health and particularly with respect to any symptoms that may require diagnosis or medical attention.

The information in this book is meant to supplement, not replace, proper [name your sport] training. Like any sport involving speed, equipment, balance, and environmental factors, (this sport) poses some inherent risk. The authors and publisher advise readers to take full responsibility for their safety and know their limits. Before practicing the skills described in this book, be sure that your equipment is well maintained, and do not take risks beyond your level of experience, aptitude, training, and comfort level.<sup>2</sup>

### **Fact, Fantasy, and Wishful Thinking**

A copyeditor does not correct factual errors. It is the author's job to provide factual content. We editors typically possess a broad base of knowledge; therefore, many times we can spot a problem and alert our clients to it.

Although editors are not fact checkers, per se, if you spot inaccuracies, false information presented as fact, or wishful thinking proffered as true, you must, at the very least, query the client. When I encounter something that sounds off, I try to find accurate information. Then when I query my client, I offer more than just "Is this true?" I provide authority on what I'm questioning. Again, another example might be helpful.

A book I worked on mentioned that the character drove from Los Angeles to San Francisco in two hours. I used to live in Santa Cruz, California, which is just south of San Francisco. Though I didn't know exactly how long it took to drive between the two cities, I knew the distance took more than two hours, so I checked the map—I was correct—and queried the author, asking him to check his travel time.

Some readers will jump on these errors and possibly call into question the authors' credibility—a death knell for an author. So let's help our clients by pointing out these errors of fact.

## Summary

Now that we've reached the end of our second lesson, I wonder if you're surprised at the number of nonfiction details we editors have to keep in mind. Editing nonfiction is very different from editing fiction, yet it's a wonderful field to work in.

Ready for your assignment? Please access the Word file Nonfiction Editing Lesson 2 Assignment.

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## Notes

1. Adapted from Amy Einsohn, *The Copyeditor's Handbook: A Guide for Publishing and Corporate Communication* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000).
2. Adapted from <https://www.thebookdesigner.com/2010/01/6-copyright-page-disclaimers-and-giving-credit/>.

