



## **NONFICTION EDITING 201**

**Instructor: Erin K. Brown**

### **Lesson #5**

#### **Developmental Editing, Part 1**

We've reached the halfway point in our study! Let's get started on our next lesson, the first of two parts.

At the beginning of my editing career, whenever I heard the phrase *developmental edit*, I backed away from any such opportunity. It seemed to me that developmental editing was for those editors who hold degrees in writing and language. However, as I look back, I don't think I could have even told you what a developmental edit was. I just knew it was for Big Boy and Big Girl editors, of whom I was not.

It wasn't until I had written a few nonfiction manuscripts and a novel that it dawned on me that I had unknowingly performed developmental edits. Sure, it wasn't the same as working with a client in developing his or her manuscript, but it was similar—and it was a light-bulb moment for me.

I'm convinced that if you can successfully edit nonfiction, you can also learn developmental editing. My goal for this lesson and the next is to give you enough information about developmental editing so that you can determine which skills you lack and then get that training. It takes work and experience to become a confident developmental editor (DE), but it can be an exciting step up in your career.

#### **Brief Overview**

Developmental editing can be defined as a major structuring of a manuscript (or restructuring if the manuscript is already written). A true developmental edit is done before one word of the manuscript is written, but reality has taught me that many manuscripts, although already written, must be deconstructed and then effectively reconstructed—in other words, be taken through a developmental edit.

But a true developmental edit begins by identifying the scope of the project. The developmental edit requires consultation with the author, agent, or project manager (PM) before the manuscript

is written. The DE will many times be part of the team that defines and hones the vision for the book. The DE contributes to the organization, content, and other aspects of the manuscript.

Following is a general checklist of common tasks of the DE (developmental editing is not concerned with spelling, punctuation, usage, and other mechanics):

- Rewrite and restructure the text so that it is well organized
- Rearrange entire chapters, paragraphs, and sentences to improve the flow
- Determine or suggest heads and subheads
- Identify gaps in content, explaining to the author what is missing and what is needed to correct
- Delete content that is outdated, irrelevant, or unnecessary to the project's subject and theme
- Strengthen the author's voice so that it is clear and articulate
- Ensure tone, style, and format is appropriate for the book's audience
- Bring clarity to the overall manuscript
- Implement reviewers' recommendations (typically in academic works)

## Required Skills

As I mentioned earlier, when I first began my editing career, I did not possess all the necessary skills to do developmental edits. I gained some proficiency through the process of editing numerous manuscripts. Other abilities I possessed were simply those that are part of my personality (organization, logic, etc., though I needed to further cultivate and improve them for application to developmental editing).

DEs are not lone rangers; rather, they are a vital part of a team that can consist of only the DE and the author, or it can also include a PM, an acquisition editor, and an agent. However, DEs are crucial to the team effort.

In addition to copyediting skills, you'll need these as a DE:

**Objectivity** is the ability to judge something based on facts rather than on emotion, prejudice, or preference. Your decisions should be based solely on what's good for the manuscript and keep the manuscript true to its goal.

**Tact** is a sense of what to say and how to say it. Chances are you'll have to suggest changes that might seem harsh to the client (deleting large sections or even chapters); therefore, choose your words carefully so that your team will hear your wisdom, experience, and desire for an excellent manuscript behind your words.

The ability to **listen** is crucial to a DE. Remember, the DE is a team member. The manuscript is not the personal property of the DE. It belongs to the author or the publisher who bought it. Listening is a difficult but vital communication skill. Repeat in your own words what a team member says to you to ensure you've heard correctly and you understand what he or she said. I was a bad listener for too many years and had to practice listening instead of talking. While one of my daughters

needed me to just listen to her without saying anything, I ate an apple, banana, nuts . . . anything that required chewing so I would not talk and had to listen. True listening was hard to learn, but by keeping my mouth busy chewing, my daughter said what she needed me to hear. I've never forgotten that lesson (though I'm still not a perfect listener!).

Following on the heels of listening comes the art of *compromise*. A good DE is probably very strong in left-brained functions (logic being high on the list). A strong left-brained thinker struggles with compromising because it seems like surrendering the best idea or solution for something less than perfect. Maybe that's true, but it's also possible that another team member's idea is just as good . . . or better! And remember, you don't own the manuscript.

This brings us to another skill necessary for DEs: *patience*. Let's say you're the DE on a three-member team that includes the author and agent. The author is the expert on the material, the agent is the expert on which publishers and acquisition editors will be interested in the manuscript, and you are the expert on developing the manuscript into a publishable piece. No one member has *all* the skills required to bring a manuscript to the bookstore shelf, but all members share that same goal.

You'll need patience, particularly with the author/client. He or she may not complete the required duties as fast as you'd like, or the agent might not respond to emails quickly, or any other number of things might not sit well with you. *Breathe*. You're working with people who have lives outside of the project. Exercise forbearance with your team members. One day you may need their patience for something you did or didn't do.

Patience's cousin is *perseverance*. Any number of situations can arise while bringing an idea or rough draft to a fully polished and publishable manuscript. Honestly, performing a developmental edit is not for the faint of heart. I can't address every eventuality you could face as a DE, but I can say that if you don't possess commitment and patience, a willingness to crawl over and around obstacles, a determination to cut through stumbling blocks, developmental editing might not be for you and you should consider carefully the types of manuscripts and authors you are willing to work with.

It's okay to admit that you don't have what it takes to be a DE. We all have our genre preferences, so it's no surprise that we also have our editing level preferences.

My first professional developmental edit project spanned three years. The author was new to writing and pleasant to work with, but throughout our working relationship, she changed her approach at least three times (and ended up with my original suggested approach); changed her voice in a few chapters that did not work; couldn't figure out how to use Word (she still struggles with it); stopped writing for about six months; stopped writing again because of surgery; let her siblings read her manuscript (and they told her to drop it); and changed family names throughout the manuscript. She wanted regular meetings with me to go over changes, address problems she was having, and brainstorm ideas. Truth be told, sometimes I didn't always answer the phone when she called. I knew she'd leave a message, but I did eventually respond to every call, either by phone or by email. These kinds of things and much, much more require perseverance. But every time you exercise it, you grow in your character and profession. (As an update, this gal published her book and has written a second one!)

Maybe this next item on our required skills list is a no-brainer, but it bears mentioning here, and that is the ability to *see the whole picture*. By that, I mean not only to understand the scope of the manuscript but also to understand all team members' contributions to the project. The DE must be able to see the potential in the client's concept and how to bring that potential into reality.

In addition to these skills, a DE should ideally have some level of familiarity with the manuscript's topic (though an experienced DE can work with just about any topic) and knowledge of a few existing comparable titles. But if you're approached to do a developmental edit concerning a topic you know little about, your deficiency could also be an advantage.

Your lack of knowledge could put you in a position to represent the readers' lack of knowledge; thus, you could pose the kinds of questions readers might ask. You can make sure the author includes the right amount and kind of information the readers will want. So don't let your "ignorance" of the topic hold you back.

### **Fears Some Authors Have When Hiring a Developmental Editor**

Before we get to the particulars of developmental editing, we need to discuss the working relationship between you and your author-client. You are helping this person reach a major goal in his or her life. You will likely be handling an idea that is near and dear to the client—personal to the author. And the nature of a developmental edit can be to tear apart the concept (or manuscript if it's been written) before rebuilding it.

We remind authors to "know your audience" when writing their manuscripts. We need to listen to our own advice and "know our clients" when entering into a working relationship. Being aware of what our clients expect, along with their fears, helps make us better editors as we build a bond with them. Let's review several ideas and some myths writers hold about the editor-author relationship.

#### ***I Will Lose Control of My Project***

This is a valid fear for many authors. Maybe they've heard horror stories about another writer whose manuscript came back from the editor dripping in red and blue deletions and insertions—so much so that she didn't recognize her work.

A good editor accepts that the manuscript belongs to the client—the boss. We can have no egos interfering with our editing. And we cannot demand that the author accept all of our changes or suggestions. Authors pay us to give our expertise, to do our best work, to offer our best advice. Period.

#### ***An Editor Will Change My Voice***

Good editors never mess with voice or style or basic story. Recognize that the author's voice is the heart of the manuscript, and make it a priority to preserve it. Though you suppress your ego as you edit, remember that the author's ego is likely fragile and don't hurt it.

#### ***How Can I Find a Reputable and Knowledgeable Editor?***

Editing is an industry that offers no licensure or standards. This can make choosing an editor a fearsome endeavor for some authors. As we discuss the proposed project with potential clients, we have to demonstrate our competence: cite previous works, propose a sample edit, provide an

assessment of the client's idea/writing sample, offer references, and so on. All of these together cannot alleviate the author's fears, so at some point, you can suggest an exit plan if either of you decides the relationship is not working (more on this later).

### ***Any Changes the Editor Makes Means I Will Lose My Original Work***

This fear is, of course, unfounded, since any worthy editor uses Track Changes in Word. Plus, you will have saved the original document in a separate file, as we covered in Lesson 1 of *Nonfiction Editing 101*.

### ***My Writers Group Already Critiqued My Manuscript***

A developmental edit from a professional provides objective feedback and familiarity with the industry and genre expectations that family and friends do not possess. A professional editor brings to the table experience from having worked on a variety of manuscripts, making him or her uniquely qualified as a DE. Although critique groups are beneficial, they are limited in how they can help an author develop his or her book idea to a publisher's standard.

### ***I Can't Afford to Hire a Developmental Editor.***

Money is a concern that must be addressed. In the previous lesson, we discussed that budgets many times determine the level of edit. Another factor is how important this project is to the author. Editing is expensive. I've said to myself many times that I can't afford to hire myself! As you discuss with a potential client the needs of the project and what that might mean in dollars, be creative with your offerings if you believe in a project. Only you know how much you need to make in any given week or month to meet your budget. And you know what the standard industry rates are. Can you scale back a portion of the work to cut the project fee? Can you break it down into smaller chunks? Is your potential client an eager learner, willing to take instruction on how to tackle a section of the manuscript, thus cutting down your time and workload?

A developmental edit is far-reaching. As we said before, it (ideally) begins before one word is ever written. It can start with brainstorming an idea and then move through all the stages of writing and editing, or it can be only working with the author just enough to help organize the structure and goal of the work.

I recently worked with an author as she developed her idea for a book on fear. She had a great "twist" to an oft-written-about topic, but she didn't know how the book should be structured, what material to include and which to leave out, or how to organize the different parts of the book. We connected over the phone every two weeks for about eight weeks. In between each call, we exchanged one email that reviewed what we had discussed. In my final email, I sent her a twelve-page outline I did that encompassed everything she needed to write her nonfiction book. Her total cost for my services: \$240 USD—a small price considering the time and frustration my work saved her, as well as setting her up with a plan she would follow when writing her manuscript.

Use your imagination when offering your services to a client who must stick to a budget. Be willing to work with your client in whatever way best suits his or her needs while not giving away your time. This kind of attitude goes a long way in building a confident and trusting author-editor relationship.

## Starting from Scratch

Let's say you've been contacted by an author to be her DE. She has yet to write the first sentence of her book. She has an idea of what she wants to write about, but she needs you to help her identify her topic, the focus of her book, her audience, and more . . . much more. Grab a cup of coffee or tea, gather your pen and pad, and pull up a chair. You have a lot of information gathering to do concerning your client-author and the project. What follows are the kinds of questions and data I collect.

### ***“Tell me about yourself—your writing experience and expectations with this project.”***

You are considering entering into a business arrangement, and you have answered your client's questions about your editing experience, training, and such. Now you need to know a bit about her and the project. Though you can't learn everything about each other, it's helpful to know the following:

- Is she a first-time author or multi-published author?
- Has she ever worked with an editor before?
- What is her relationship with the acquisition editor/agent (if applicable)? Is she complaining about them? If so, that could indicate discontent—and you might be next in line to be disparaged. But if she speaks positively, you can probably rest assured that she's a true team member.
- How does she accept suggested changes to her manuscript? Her answer will reveal her attitude and “feelings” toward someone “tampering” with her manuscript. The nature of the DE's job requires suggesting and making changes—sometimes major ones. If an author resents changes or expects to be coddled, you may be in for a rocky relationship.
- However, if she cares more about creating a top-notch manuscript than her ego, then it's likely the project will not suffer from relationship woes.

### ***“Why do you want to write a book?”***

If she wants to write a book for the money, you might take that as a red flag. There's nothing wrong with earning money from writing books, but if that is her only motive, I'm sure I don't need to tell you that writing books is hard work and takes countless hours. The per-hour earnings are ridiculous. Even if she sells her first title to a publisher, her advance *might* cover your developmental editing fee, copyediting, and proofreading. The standing advice is “Don't quit your day job.” Eventually, years down the road, she could make a living writing if she has one solid seller after another. If her purpose is to make money, it's doubtful she'll stick to writing. But if she has a timely message to share with others in hopes of inspiring them to a better life, you probably want to probe a bit more.

### ***“What topic do you want to write about?”***

As we saw in the first lesson, nonfiction is immensely popular. It satisfies a vast range of needs for readers. It provides knowledge and answers to any number of questions. Nonfiction entertains us. It tells about famous people, living and dead, overcoming their challenges. Nonfiction informs us about exotic places to visit and what to see and do in various locations around the world. Books about culture, politics, and economics provide opinions and advice. We can learn about deepening our walk with the Lord by reading books on Christian living and Bible studies. Nonfiction books

can inspire us as we face difficult, life-changing trials. When we need to know how to change habits, fix a leaky roof, lose weight, or a myriad of other things, the vast list of self-help titles is at our fingertips.

Ask these additional questions to help your client focus on what she will write:

- What are you passionate about?
- What intrigues you?
- What inspires you?
- What frustrates you?
- What makes you laugh?
- In what topic(s) are you well versed?
- What do you know that people want to know?

Asking these questions, along with her answers, may trigger ideas she's never considered. And brainstorming can generate enthusiasm for the project—in both of you!

### Sign on the Dotted Line

Using contracts is standard business practice. When clients hire an editor, they enter into a legal relationship, and it is in both parties' interest to specify the terms of that relationship in writing. Written agreements between editor and client clarify responsibilities, deadlines, fees, early termination, and other specifics before any work begins. Following is a sample contract template from The Editors' Association from Canada, <http://www.editors.ca/hire/contract>. I chose this as an example because it is exhaustive. From this, you can build a contract that suits you, your business, and your clients.

*The Editors' Association of Canada/Association Canadienne des réviseurs (EAC/ACR) approved this model on May 15, 1999, for the use of its members and the public in preparing editorial contracts. EAC/ACR accepts no liability with respect to the proper completion of the agreement or alterations made to it.*

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## Agreement Template for Editing Services

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### Preamble

The Editors' Association of Canada (Editors Canada) developed this template for members to use when preparing agreements for editing services. The terms and conditions suggested here align with the recommendations and requirements of the *Professional Editorial Standards* (<http://www.editors.ca/publications/professional-editorial-standards>) and provide the basis for a successful working relationship between a client and an editor.

This template is not a complete agreement. It offers a framework with suggestions for drafting a document that reflects the agreement each editor should reach with a client about the work to be done. Some sections may not apply to a given situation. Editors will

need to determine which clauses best reflect their needs and whether some clauses need to be added, modified, or removed to reflect the circumstances.

This template was developed for use in Canadian common law jurisdictions. The laws of other countries and the laws specific to the province of Quebec have not been considered.

### Disclaimer

The information contained in this template is not legal advice and should not be treated as a substitute for advice from a legal professional. Editors Canada accepts no liability for documents created with this template.

### Using the Template

This template has been prepared for use as a Microsoft Word document. Space for details is indicated by shaded Text Form Fields, for example, {write details here}. To add text, simply select the field and type. There is no limit to the amount of text you can add in each field.

Suggestions for using the template, and additional or alternative clauses you may want to consider, are included in the document as "hidden text":

If you do not see a line of hidden text immediately above this paragraph (shown in small italic font), the following instructions will help you correct the problem.

You can control whether you **see** hidden text by changing Word's **viewing** options. You can control whether you **print** hidden text by changing Word's **printing** options. For instructions on how to do this, consult the Help files for your version of Word.

To use clauses suggested in the hidden text, change the **style** of the hidden text to **Normal** and number the paragraph or, if the style is available in your document, change the hidden text to **Numbered Para**. For instructions on using styles, consult the Help files for your version of Word.

You should delete any remaining hidden text before providing your client with a copy of the completed agreement.

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# Agreement for Editing Services

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### Parties

This Agreement is between {Name} ("Editor"), operating in the province/territory of {Province/Territory}, Canada, and {Name} ("Client"):

#### **Editor**

**EDITOR NAME** {Name}

**EDITOR ADDRESS** {Address}

**EDITOR TELEPHONE**      {Telephone}

**EDITOR EMAIL**      {Email}

***Client***

**CLIENT NAME**              {Name}

**CLIENT ADDRESS**    {Address}

**CLIENT TELEPHONE**      {Telephone}

**CLIENT EMAIL**      {Email}

The Parties agree as follows:

**Effective Dates**

This Agreement will begin on {Date} and continue until terminated, as provided in this Agreement.

**Statement of Work**

***Project Description***

{Describe the project.}

***Type of Editing and Work Plan***

{Describe the type of editing required.}

The project {does/does not} include multiple drafts. The work plan is as follows: {description}.

The Editor will deliver the completed product to the Client by {method of delivery, e.g., email, Express Post, uploaded HTML} on or before {date}.

***Place of Work and Meetings***

{State where the work and meetings will take place.}

***Changes and Additions***

Any additions or changes to the project will modify the Statement of Work, may change the due date, and may be billed as additional work. Changes made to material that has already been submitted to the Editor for editing may be considered additional work.

The Editor will keep the Client informed of additional work that is required or recommended and request the Client's approval for any additional work, associated expenses, and change in the project deadline.

The Client and Editor agree that requests for additional work and renegotiated deadlines or fees will be in writing as described under Notice.

### ***Deadline***

The work plan requires that both the Client and the Editor meet the agreed milestones. Adjustments to the work plan may be required if the agreed milestones are not met.

### ***Delivery Details***

{Describe what you will be returning to your client and how.}

**Inherent Qualities:** Digital files may become corrupted or erased with improper use, and storage media (e.g., DVDs) may degrade over time. It is the Client's responsibility to ensure the safekeeping and stability of the files once the Editor has released them to the Client.

### Financial Details

#### ***Fees/Rate***

The Editor's fees are \${{#.##} per X}, plus applicable taxes if the Client resides in Canada. Hourly time is billed {e.g., in quarter-hour segments}. The Client will pay the Editor as follows: {specify details, including payment terms and accepted methods of payment}.

**Expenses:** The Client {will/will not} reimburse the Editor for expenses incurred in fulfilling this agreement.

*Expenses include {list the relevant expenses}* **Invoicing:** The Editor will invoice the fees when the project is complete. All work, including {edits, drafts, notes, and research}, is the exclusive property of the Editor until the Client's account is paid in full. Once the Client pays all fees due under this Agreement, any copyright the Editor may have in the product developed under this Agreement will transfer to the Client.

**Overdue Payments:** The Client will pay the Editor within {#} days of receiving the Editor's invoice. Any payment after the due date is subject to late fees of {2}% per month ({{26.8}% per year).

### Other Terms and Conditions

#### ***Editor's Status***

The Editor is an independent contractor. Nothing in this Agreement will be understood to create a partnership, joint venture or co-venture, agency, or employment relationship between the Client and the Editor.

At the option of the Editor, the Client may credit the Editor for the work developed under this Agreement.

#### ***Confidentiality and Non-Disclosure***

The Client will provide all information that has a direct bearing on the successful outcome of the project and will inform the Editor in writing of any portion of the work or related information that is confidential. The Editor will hold in confidence and not disclose the

confidential information to any third party, except with the Client's written consent or as required by law with prior notice to the Client.

The Editor will take all reasonable steps to safeguard and prevent the loss, destruction, or unauthorized access, use, or disclosure of the confidential information using a reasonable degree of care and no less than the same degree of care used to protect the Editor's own confidential information. The Editor will promptly return to the Client or destroy, as directed by the Client, confidential information and any other Client property requested by the Client at any time.

The Editor will not make any unauthorized use of any of the Client's trade secrets, confidential information, proprietary property, trademarks, or copyrighted materials.

### ***Use of Copyrighted Work***

The Editor will endeavour to flag elements of a work that may require copyright permissions and, depending upon the terms specified in this Agreement, may assist the Client in obtaining the necessary permissions. However, unless otherwise specified in this Agreement, the Client accepts responsibility for complying with copyright laws and obtaining the necessary permission to use any elements of provided text, graphics, photos, music and song lyrics, designs, trademarks, or other created work to be included in the final product.

### ***Warranties***

Editing is a process of offering advice and suggestions to the Client. While the Editor will make every effort to identify and bring questionable material to the Client's attention, it is not possible to guarantee error-free content.

The Editor's responsibility is limited to notifying the Client of any suspected or unresolved issues within the edited work. The Client is responsible for accepting (or rejecting) the Editor's suggestions and resolving any issues identified by the Editor (e.g., suspected plagiarism).

Rejecting or disliking the Editor's suggestions is not a basis for refusing to pay the fees outlined in this Agreement.

### ***Indemnity and Liability***

The Editor will comply with all applicable laws in the course of performing the services.

The Client agrees to indemnify the Editor from any and all claims or demands, including legal fees, that arise out of any alleged libel, copyright infringement, or other legal or contractual issues created by the Client in writing, revising, publishing, or otherwise using the work.

**Failure to Perform:** If the Editor cannot perform the duties outlined in this Agreement for reasons beyond the Client's or Editor's control, the Editor will refund any amount paid by the Client for services not delivered (including any unearned portion/excluding any

portion} of a deposit, if paid). The Client will not have any further liability with respect to the Agreement.

The Editor will not be liable for any amount in excess of the fees due under the Agreement.

This limitation on liability also applies if information or materials are damaged or lost without fault on the part of the Editor.

### ***Termination***

This Agreement may be terminated by the Client or the Editor with at least {# hours'/# days'} notice. If the Agreement is terminated, the Client will pay the Editor, as specified under Financial Details, for work done and expenses incurred up to the date of termination. Subject to the terms for a deposit, any fees advanced will be credited against the amount due.

The provisions of this Agreement that by their nature are intended to extend beyond its termination will survive and remain in effect despite the completion of the services or the termination of the Agreement. This includes the sections of this Agreement required for its interpretation and enforcement.

### ***Notice***

Notice by one party to the other under or for the purposes of this Agreement (including for the purpose of modifying it) will be in writing and will be {personally delivered or sent by fax, email, or prepaid mail} to the address set out at the beginning of this Agreement.

Communications sent by prepaid mail will be considered to have been given and received on the fourth business day after the day of mailing. Communications by fax or email will be considered to have been given and received at the time of delivery or transmission if that delivery or transmission occurs prior to 4:00 p.m. on a business day, failing which the communication will be considered to have been given and received on the next business day. For the purposes of this Agreement, a business day means any weekday that is not a holiday.

### ***Dispute Resolution***

The Client or the Editor may request that any dispute arising out of this Agreement be submitted to binding arbitration before a mutually agreed-upon arbitrator in accordance with the arbitration legislation of the governing province or territory. The arbitrator's decision or award will be final.

### ***Applicable Law***

This Agreement will be governed and interpreted in accordance with the laws of Canada and the province/territory of {province/territory}.

If any part of this Agreement is found to be unlawful, void, or for any reason unenforceable, it will be considered separate from this Agreement and will not affect the validity and enforceability of the remaining Agreement. If either the Client or the Editor waives a

breach or default under this Agreement, the waiver will not apply to a repeat of the same breach or to a breach or default of another clause in the Agreement.

**Modification of Agreement**

Any modification of this Agreement must be in writing and acknowledged in writing by both the Client and the Editor.

**Signatures**

The Client and the Editor each confirm that they have full power and authority to enter into this Agreement and acknowledge that their electronic signatures are sufficient proof of accepting the terms of this Agreement.

**DATE:** {Date}

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<b>Editor</b> {Editor's Name}	<b>Client</b> {Client's Name}
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In Part 2, we will pick up where we left off here. We'll discuss more preliminary steps to take before beginning the manuscript (determining your approach, establishing the author's purpose, and much more).

## **LESSON #5 ASSIGNMENT**

*To receive a Certificate of Completion, you will need to complete one assignment from each lesson.*

Please access the Word file Nonfiction Editing Lesson 4 Assignment.

Design/write a checklist when proposing a developmental edit to a potential client. Include questions, statements . . . whatever you believe is necessary to form a clear concept of the project, expectations (yours and the client's), procedures, timeline, cost, and any other issues/concerns.

If you have done any developmental editing, please share both the best and worst things from one experience.