



NONFICTION EDITING 201

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Lesson #6

Developmental Editing, Part 2

Welcome to Lesson 6. We will finish our discussion of developmental editing. Let's do a quick review of what we learned in the previous lesson.

Summary of Part 1

We started by learning the big picture of developmental editing, which can be defined as a major structuring or restructuring of a manuscript. Then we covered a general checklist of tasks of the DE (developmental editor), followed by skills all DEs should possess, such as tact, objectivity, listening, patience, compromise, and perseverance.

Then we covered some fears authors may have regarding having their work edited.

Next, we covered questions DEs can ask prospective clients to learn about the author's writing experience, purpose for writing the current manuscript, and passions they want to share with others.

Finally, we closed with a sample contract from the Editors' Association from Canada. Of course, this is not the only sample contract available, and you might even have your own, but this contract covers several concerns.

Now, let's get back to Part 2 of our lesson!

More Preliminaries

After you and your client have entered into your agreement, you have a few more decisions to make about the manuscript. Even if you are beginning your editorial work after the manuscript has been written, and depending upon its condition, you may still have to make decisions on some of these things. I'm talking about approach, purpose, descriptive statement, audience, and structure. Let's take them one at a time to understand what we must do.

Determine Your Approach

Let's say your client wants to write about home schooling. It is her passion, and she's taught her five children K–12, so she is well-versed in the schooling process, courses of studies, benefits and struggles, and the home-schooling community. Throughout the years she's learned a lot about children, learning styles, parenting, motivation, curricula, teaching methods, communication . . . the list goes on. This is great. The topic could be taken in any number of directions.

Continue brainstorming with your client, this time using nonfiction genres to explore ways to approach her project. Following are just a few genres this topic could fit into (feel free to add to the list):

- Memoir
- Self-Help
- Textbook/Curriculum
- Humor
- Politics
- Culture
- Religion
- Inspiration

Many linear, logical thinkers will naturally devise an outline for their books. But not all authors are predisposed this way. So as your client's editor, I hope this is your strong suit. As you brainstorm, you can put together an outline—the skeleton of the book—which will be the writing guide.

Another way to discover different approaches is mind mapping. A visual representation of the thought process helps to clarify ideas. Besides that, mind maps are fun to do! All you need is paper and a pencil (colored pencils heighten the visual experience), or a simple mind-mapping app might be more to your (or your client's) liking (I use SimpleMind on my iPad). This exercise can spark creative approaches to writing about any topic.

On the next page is a sample of a mind map for Cinderella, created by Evelyn Lim from AbundanceTapestry.com.

- In what topic(s) are you well versed?
- What do you know that people want to know?

Write a Brief Descriptive Statement

Now that you and your client have brainstormed the book’s topic, approach, genre (subgenre), and purpose, it’s time to write the book’s descriptive statement that captures what the book is about. You’re probably familiar with these kinds of statements if you’ve written or edited fiction. Following are a few examples:

- *The Purpose Driven Life*: A forty-day spiritual journey that answers the question “What on earth am I here for?”
- *10,000 Reasons*: Stories of faith, hope, and thankfulness inspired by the worship anthem
- *Why Did She Jump?*: My daughter’s battle with bipolar disorder

Oftentimes the descriptive sentence, or a form of it, becomes the book’s subtitle.

Identify Your Audience

Whether you edit fiction or nonfiction, you know that the author should have identified her audience before she began writing her book. She should have categorized the following basic information about her readers:

- Age
- Gender
- Income bracket
- Marital status
- Interests
- Lifestyle
- Education

But what if she asks, “Why do I need to do that? I know what I want to write.”

That’s a good question and one that deserves an answer that will convince her to identify her audience. Let’s quickly run through the answers.

A proposal must include demographics about the target audience, so she’ll need to have identified her audience. True, but what if she intends to self-publish? Read on.

Marketing is designed according to the target audience. If the book is an inspirational title with Christian women as its audience, the advertisements, cover art, illustrations (literary and graphics) . . . everything about the book will reflect this readership. Advertisements won’t be found on Facebook pages featuring racing cars or hunting. Not enough women engage in this lifestyle to spend marketing budgets here. Instead, marketing will be targeted to the areas where this audience hangs out, getting the best response for time and money budgets.

Style and vocabulary should be appropriate for the audience. Again using our inspirational title for Christian women, the style could be an interesting mix of serious to humorous. Vocabulary choices can include the feminine touch: “Make your ‘prayer closet’ comfy and inviting. Include a few pillows and a throw for colors. Design your space to fit your personality. Soft, glowing scented candles add to the expectancy of connecting with God.”

The book's title will reflect the target audience. Let's say our Christian women's inspirational book is on prayer. Though I'm not good at coming up with titles, I do know that *Taming the World through Powerful Prayer* might not be the most compelling for our target audience. That doesn't mean that women don't want to effect change in the world or experience power in their prayers; it's just that the word choice doesn't fit as well as it could with the intended audience.

Explaining these things to your client should help her see that the seemingly inconsequential choices can have a huge impact on the success of her book.

Just as a descriptive statement encapsulates the book's idea and keeps the author on track with the subject, a descriptive sentence about the audience will help focus the author on writing every word with this readership in mind. So have your client write a sentence defining her audience. If it helps, she could find and print out a picture of someone who epitomizes her ideal reader—keep it where she can see it when she writes as a constant reminder that this is the person she is “speaking” to.

In one sense, clearly defining why your client wants to write a book, formulating her topic, determining her approach, establishing her purpose, writing a descriptive sentence, and defining the audience is a lot of work to do before she ever starts putting her idea into a manuscript. But it's time well spent. When she begins the writing process, she'll have a clear idea of what she will write, how she will write, and to whom she will write. Every thought and word will be aimed at this target.

And if you're starting a developmental edit after the manuscript has been written, you'll still need to know these things before you begin your work. They will be your invaluable guide as you move through the manuscript, keeping you focused as you address the many issues you're sure to encounter.

Organization/Structure

You probably don't need me to tell you that a manuscript's organization can be the most difficult challenge in a developmental edit—or any edit, for that matter. A book's organization is high on the list of conditions that contribute to its success. The goal is for the book to flow smoothly and seamlessly from chapter to chapter, paragraph to paragraph, sentence to sentence, capturing the audience from the first word all the way to the satisfying ending.

Very early in my career, I hit a brick wall so hard I'm sure the bang could be heard throughout my neighborhood. The manuscript I was editing was such a confusing mess that I had to print out several chapters, cut the pages apart according to paragraphs, and then physically piece the paragraphs and chapters back together. I still remember my angst. But this primitive form of reconstructing the chaos from a muddle into a coherent flow wowed the author. She said, “You get me!” That was a huge morale booster—and a relief!

I recently completed a manuscript evaluation that called upon every ounce of my organizational skill. Lack of or faulty organization makes it impossible for readers to understand what the author is trying to say. We editors can tell if authors know their topics well, but their words and ideas are meaningless if readers can't follow them because of poor organization and lack of structure. Truth be told, I'm such a word nerd that even though a manuscript in organizational disarray is stressful, it's also the challenge I love because I can actively work with it and “see” the difference between

before and after—kind of like the satisfaction one experiences when cleaning and organizing a cluttered closet. Don't be afraid to confront organizational issues in a manuscript.

To a great extent, the theme will help determine the book's organization. Let's say you're working with a book on how to start a business. This book should be organized by the steps to take, starting with first things first: business plan, business structure, business registration with the state, and so on.

Let's explore the various forms of nonfiction organization. Following are tips you can use to guide your client before the manuscript is written or to help you rework the existing manuscript.

CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

Chronological order begins with what occurs first, second, and so on. It takes readers through the history of the topic. Flashbacks can be used, but the main structure retains the chronological flow. Books that use chronological order include memoirs, biographies, and history.

BASIC TO COMPLEX

Basic to complex titles begin with broad or simple ideas and work their way to more focused and complex material. This provides a slow, easy introduction to the subject, helping the readers become familiar with the subject and vocabulary, which then builds their confidence in using or applying the subject matter. Books that use basic to complex include educational texts, website design, personal finance.

CATEGORY

Category organizes a book by groups when no hierarchy or inherent sequence exists. The material is organized into distinct groups that can be presented in any order. Readers don't necessarily have to read from front to back to get the information they are seeking. For example, a manuscript about learning styles would arrange the material according to each style.

TWO-PART STRUCTURE

The two-part structure separates the material into two categories and repeats them throughout the book. It can include before and after, cause and effect, problem and solution, pros and cons. Science and math books are based on the two-part structure. Also, many children's books use the problem-solution format.

STORYTELLING

Storytelling is used in creative nonfiction. It borrows techniques from fiction to create drama and suspense while providing factual narratives. Devotionals employ telling a story to help readers better understand the topic. Several other nonfiction genres use storytelling techniques in many ways, such as to illustrate/explain a point, situations, applications of problem solving, and more.

Additional formats include logical sequence (a-b-c; numbered or ordered steps). Oftentimes, a manuscript will effectively employ a combination of structures. For example, a memoir will follow

a chronological order, but it also uses storytelling, which can be a vital component of the overall structure.

The most important “rule” to follow is that the material is presented in a format that makes sense and allows a smooth flow from one idea to the next.

Outline! Outline! Outline!

You are probably familiar with the age-old fiction argument over whether or not to write by the seat of your pants or by plotting/synopsis. Both sides have pros and cons, and both are viable ways of writing fiction.

I’m of the mind that one should not write nonfiction without some form of an outline (see mind mapping earlier in this lesson); the most basic of which is the table of contents. And my experience with manuscripts that have problems with organization has taught me that they can *always* be fixed by creating and following an outline.

An outline, like a fiction synopsis, exposes problems early in the process, making corrections in structure and organization fast and easy. I recently did a manuscript review on a 40K-word nonfiction manuscript. The manuscript’s organization was a nightmare. In my twenty-plus years of professionally editing, this won the gold medal of jumbled, incomplete, incoherent manuscripts. Its condition made it difficult to do a thorough and meaningful review/evaluation. It was sometimes impossible to follow the author’s line of thought. I explained the problem and suggested he outline the shortest chapter, making each paragraph’s topic sentence a subpoint (the chapter title being the main point). When he had completed this exercise, I asked him to study his outline and answer the following questions:

- What do you notice? What stands out as confusing, incoherent, or out of place?
- Does one subpoint flow logically to the next?
- Do all subpoints fit within the main point?
- Should any subpoints be moved to another location within the chapter?
- Should any subpoints be deleted because they don’t fit within the main point?
- Should any subpoints be moved to another chapter?

This exercise was a tremendous eye-opener to him. His outline allowed him to see the problem: lack of organization, which interfered with a logical flow and so on. (It’s always best when the client sees the problem and isn’t just told about it.)

Honestly, for some writers, creating outlines seems like a boring waste of time, but it’s a vital road map, helping the author stay on track from the first word of the manuscript until the last. And if the author chooses to seek traditional publishing, he or she will be required to submit an outline with the proposal. So it’s a task that must be done. Why not do it at the beginning of the project so it can be a guide in writing the manuscript?

Remember, an outline doesn't have to follow this structure:

- I.
 - A.
 - B.
 - 1.
 - 2.

It can be the mind mapping we covered as well as writing an idea and then adding a sentence or two—even fragmented sentences—that puts a bit of flesh on that idea.

Following are a couple of links to help write leads and outlines:

[52 Ways to Write Interesting Leads—Attract and Keep Readers](#)

[Ask the Editor: How to Outline a Non-Fiction Book](#)

Let's Write

Whether you're helping your client develop her book as she writes it, or you're doing a developmental edit on an existing manuscript, your goal is to aid your client in producing a book that keeps the readers turning pages. The leads (chapter hooks) should scare readers, intrigue them, surprise them, humor them, or even anger them. Whatever you and your client choose, the lead must compel readers to keep on reading.

If you're following an outline, the beginning, middle, and ending of each chapter will support the chapter topic. Each paragraph will transition smoothly from one to the next.

The end of your chapter doesn't have to be dramatic or sweeping. In fact, the conclusion should be concise. The final paragraph can be a summary of the chapter's main points. A hint of what's coming in the next chapter can be a great hook to keep the reader flipping the pages.

Summary

We have covered a lot of information in these two lessons on developmental editing—from brainstorming the idea for a book to digging in and applying your editing skills to the manuscript. It's been a long journey, so thanks for joining me!

Resources: "Publishing Nonfiction," Ed2Go (2016).

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LESSON #6 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 6 Assignment.