NONFICTION EDITING 201

Instructor: Erin K. Brown

Lesson #8

Editing for the Business Market

Welcome to our last session of Nonfiction Editing 201! You've been enjoyable companions along this fabulous journey.

Editing for the business market has some peculiarities that no other nonfiction genre has. Though it will always be necessary to look for common elements—audience, grammar, punctuation, clarity, and consistency—business or corporate editing requires meeting ridiculously short deadlines while not compromising accuracy. Some would say that editing for this market is a balance between science and art.

These are a few types of documents and other materials businesses use that require editing:[1]
- Marketing
  - Brochures
  - Case studies
  - Web pages
  - Presentation materials
  - Press releases
  - White papers
  - Magazines (online and print)
  - Newsletters
  - Annual reports
  - Video scripts
  - Product demo

- Technical
  - Technical briefs
  - Data sheets
  - Technical reports
  - Engineering specs

- o Books
- o Human factors studies

- Legal
  - o Contracts
  - o Law memoranda
  - o Journal articles

- End-User
  - o User manuals
  - o Online help
  - o Release notes
  - o Online tutorials
  - o Classroom training materials
  - o Quick reference guides

Each category has its distinct audience, vocabulary, and review cycle, which we will discuss. First, let's talk about brand and voice.

Brand and Voice

A company's brand is far more than its logo, slogan, or jingle. It is who it is and what it promises to consumers. For example, Coca-Cola's brand is "Taste the feeling." It does not say it is a soda but makes a promise to those who drink its products—you'll feel something. How about Geico's "15 minutes or less can save you 15% or more on car insurance." It's a straightforward, measurable promise. Walmart promises: "Save people money so they can live better."

When we hear "voice" as it pertains to the written word, we automatically think of literature—both fiction and nonfiction. But a company has a voice too. It is how the company says what it says. For example, if Apple were to delete its logo and slogan, would consumers recognize the company's content as Apple? In other words, is a company's voice unique, or does it sound like every other company? A company's voice emerges organically from the founder's and leaders' values and personalities.

I mention brand and voice in this lesson because all print and online content, as well as speeches and audio presentations, must stay true to brand and voice. If you're editing business content, first you must recognize the company's voice, be able to spot when material veers off course, and then direct it back.

You may wonder how to identify a company's brand and voice. The best way is to read their website, white papers, newsletters, etc.; study their style guide (if they have one); and ask the client. It's possible that the company you're editing for hasn't developed its voice. In fact, it's not uncommon for many businesses not to have found their voice—and that's unfortunate. Let me ask you this: Does your website reflect your business's unique voice? Have you found your business voice? Have I? Of all the websites I regularly visit, one stands above all the others because of its

brand and voice. Its personality is evident in its tagline: "We take tea personally." (Sadly, they no longer use this tagline, and I cannot locate their existing one. Their mission statement is "To deliver the perfect cup of tea to every person of any culture.")

What if you cannot detect the company's voice, or the client has no idea what you're asking him or her? You'll have to assume a generic voice that is friendly but not overly familiar. Use the present tense. Convey confidence without going overboard into arrogance. Above all, don't talk down to the end user.

Target Audience

By now you know that every piece of written content must consider its target audience. This is true of business communications. Keep in mind that one company might put out several types of documents, each one targeting a different audience. If you look back to our brief list of types of business content, it becomes obvious that a variety of audiences must be considered. The right message has to go to the right audience. Mary Johnson, in *The Art of Editing for the Corporate Market*, gives us a handy chart:[2]

Content Type	Content's Intended Purpose	Audience
Article, white paper, brochure, poster, case study, news-letter, company website	Showcase a product, service, or company; educate and influence in a low-key style	Current and potential customers
Technical brief	Explain a concept	Internal and external technical audiences, trade journal editors and writers
Press release	Document or announce an event	Investors and current and potential customers
Annual report	Document results	Company shareholders
Slide presentation, user manual, video script, training materials	Describe how a product or technology works	Company employees, salespeople, potential customers, end-users

Web Pages

Online content requires special consideration. It's been said that the human attention span wanes after eight seconds. This is particularly true when people open a web page. Most visitors skim the material. Therefore, make sure that the information is relevant and valuable.

Many online content writers employ the inverted pyramid method of writing, which puts the most important information, or conclusions, first. If the piece you're editing does not present information in this order, you will want to consider changing it to this hierarchical ranking.

When someone visits a page, generally they are looking for specific information. Edit content for conciseness, and make sure the writing doesn't veer from the topic.

Assuming the majority of visitors to a business's website are skimmers, consider the following tips as you edit:
- Use bulleted lists instead of paragraphs when appropriate
- Avoid large blocks of text
- Employ short, interesting paragraphs, as well as short sentences
- Use headings and subheadings (SEO friendly)
- Use *you* instead of *I*
- Make sure the keywords are used throughout the text (without stuffing)
- Navigation buttons should be easily accessible and self-explanatory

Figure 8.1. Typical web page layout

Word for Word

When Jargon Isn't Jargon

Jargon is terminology that is unique to a profession or group and is not easily understood by the general audience. When editing fiction and general nonfiction, we normally get rid of jargon, but for the corporate market, it's sometimes better, even expected, to use jargon. Actually, it's not considered jargon when the words are used in their proper setting.

Using these buzz words in their appropriate environment becomes a sort of communication shorthand among insiders. One word of jargon can save writing, and reading, several words. For example, a medical paper read by medical professionals would use *agonal* rather than the more cumbersome "a major, negative change in a patient's condition." A businessperson would expect a white paper to use *due diligence* instead of "putting effort into research before making a business decision."

When editing business materials, allow jargon if the readers are "insiders." You may need to familiarize yourself with the appropriate and expected terminology.
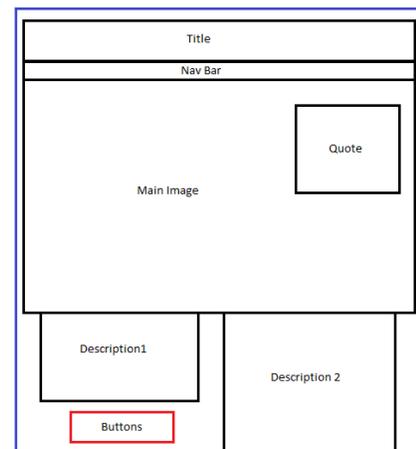
Acronyms

As with any specialized field, businesses use several acronyms. Like jargon, they are a language shortcut. When using business terminology for the general audience, spell out the term followed by its acronym in parentheses on the first use: *return on investment (ROI)*. For subsequent uses, the acronym is sufficient. However, if your audience is, say, a company's board of directors, the full term is not necessary. These readers understand the acronyms.

Here's a handy list of common business terms and their acronyms:
https://www.altalang.com/beyond-words/2014/02/17/40-business-acronyms-know/.

Neologisms

Language is always in flux. But it seems that in the past ten years or so, we've been bombarded with a host of new words, especially in the area of technology. Neologisms are new words or words used in new ways. They are common and understood but have not yet made their way into dictionaries. Following are just a few neologisms that most people recognize:

- *Crowdsourcing*—getting a large group of people to contribute to a project or task
- *Tebowing*—a prayerful victory stance derived from NFL quarterback Tim Tebow
- *Geobragging*—repeated status updates noting your location in an attempt to get attention or make other people jealous
- *Noob*—a newcomer to an online or gaming community
- *404*—someone who is clueless
- *Phygital* (*physical* plus *digital*)—a marketing term that describes blending digital experiences with physical ones

The first rule to follow with neologisms is to know who the audience is. That fact will be your guiding principle as to if and when to use neologisms. Find more neologisms here.

Trademarks

A trademark is a word (or group of words), symbol, or distinctive mark that is legally registered and represents a company, product, or service. You've seen the symbols ^{TM}, ^{SM}, and ^{R}, which you likely recognize as meaning "trademark," "service mark," and "registered," respectively. Their meanings are similar yet distinct. According to the US Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO),

> A trademark is a word, phrase, symbol, and/or design that identifies and distinguishes the source of the goods of one party from those of others. A service mark is a word, phrase, symbol, and/or design that identifies and distinguishes the source of a service rather than goods. . . . However, you may use the federal registration symbol "®" only after the USPTO actually registers a mark [trademark or service mark], and not while an application is pending. Also, you may use the registration symbol with the mark only on or in connection with the goods and/or services listed in the federal trademark registration.

For more information please visit https://www.uspto.gov/.

Trademarks, service marks, and registration marks all contribute to the brand identity, which is a type of asset. Misuse of these marks can create the loss of their original meaning and possibly cause

the company name or product to become a generic term. Consider these well-known products that are trademarked but have become generic terms:

- Aspirin—a Bayer trademark name for acetylsalicylic acid
- Escalator—originally a trademark of Otis Elevator Company
- Lanolin—trademarked as the term for a preparation of water and the wax from sheep's wool

As an editor for a company, one of your jobs is to protect the company's name and products/services by understanding trademarks and using them correctly.

In running text in books, trademark symbols are not used; however, if you are editing website content or other documents, you may be required to attach the appropriate symbol when using the product/service name. Every company is different when using these symbols. For example, iRobot.com attaches the registered symbol to most of its products. Not so for HP or Apple. So be sure to know how the company wants its trademark symbols used in their various printed and online documents.

Verbing

We can't leave this section on trademarks without talking about the subject of verbing, which is creating verbs from nouns. This process has been around for about as long as English has been spoken and written, but along with the influx of new terms for our ever-increasing technology, it seems that verbing is running rampant. The purpose of verbing is to create content that is snappy and makes an impact. While using nouns as verbs might easily be understood, be careful. Always consider your audience and the content when deciding about their presence in the copy you're editing.

You already know the advice about avoiding using trademark names but instead using the generic name (for example, tissue rather than Kleenex) in fiction and general nonfiction works. But what about using a trademark name as a verb? The obvious go-to example is *Google*. There's no mistaking what it means "to Google." A company might think that having their name bantered about like this is good because of brand awareness. Well, Suzanne Choney, writer for NBC News, learned what Google thinks of its name as a verb: "A trademark is a word, name, symbol or device that identifies a particular company's products or services. Google is a trademark identifying Google Inc. and our search technology and services. While we're pleased that so many people think of us when they think of searching the web, let's face it, we do have a brand to protect, so we'd like to make clear that you should please only use 'Google' when you're referring to Google Inc. and our services."[3]

I assume Google views the verbing of its name as a step closer to making it a generic term for searching the internet for information. Companies work hard and spend big bucks to establish their trademarks, and reducing them to generic terms is like losing a beloved child. (Think how you'd feel if your business name became the generic term for book editing.) These trademark names that have been "genericized" might surprise you:

- Thermos—originally the Thermos trademark name for a vacuum flask
- Trampoline—originally the trademark of the Griswold-Nissen Trampoline & TumblingCompany
- Videotape—originally trademarked by Ampex Corporation

Style Guides

You know about style guides, so I want to mention only a couple of reminders. First, if the company you are editing for has its own house style guide, make sure you have the most recent edition and follow it. Second, if the company you consistently edit for does not have a style guide, consider creating one. You probably have already created an informal guide from the previous documents and content you edited, so compiling a style guide (and getting it into the hands of the writers) won't take too much time—and could even save you editing time in the long run.

Global Concerns

If a company has a website, chances are good it has a global presence. Hey, even I am part of the global business community, for I have several clients from Canada, Australia, England, Spain, South Africa, Chile, and Northern Ireland. You probably have clients from other countries, too, which tags you as a member of the global business community. What we're about to cover applies not only to the company you are editing for but also to your own business.

With this in mind, be aware of some dos and don'ts.

Don't use seasons of the year to reference time: *Join us for the summer convention. It is just around the corner!* Summer to you might be June 21 through September 21, but to clients in the Southern Hemisphere, that's their winter. Instead, use exact dates, or at least the months.

Do write out dates to avoid confusion: May 15, 2017.

Do use a twenty-four-hour time format and include the time zone: 14:30 Mountain Time.

Do put metric measurements in parentheses following English measurements: 35 miles (56.3 km).

Do use currency abbreviation when referring to price: USD $500. (See *CMOS* 9.20–25.)

Do be aware of the differences in the following areas:[4]
- Accounting practices
- Acronyms and abbreviations
- Addresses and address formats
- Forms of address and titles
- Geographic references
- Legal information
- List separators
- Number formatting
- Sorting and collating order

- Technology
- Telephone number format

Your Responsibility

Like any specialized field, business content and documents require adherence to a number of details not found in general nonfiction. You already know about accuracy, consistency, usage, spelling, punctuation, flow, transitions . . . Needless to say, you have a lot on your plate.

First, you are an advocate for the reader. You bring the readers' perspective to your work and ensure that the document includes exactly what readers need—nothing more and nothing less. And when it comes to user manuals and the like, user safety is paramount, as well as compliance with standards, company policies, and in some cases the law.

Of course, you must maintain a good working relationship with writers. Sometimes several writers contribute to one document or one web page, and you must bring together all the fragments into one seamless and coherent piece—all without imposing your personal style.

And then you have to consider the needs of the businesses that are employing you to edit their materials. Two other factors will help you as you edit for businesses. First, know about the company you are working for—its products/services, personnel, etc.; and, second, know the company's publishing process—cycles, deadlines, etc.

This checklist might help as you prepare to edit a business piece:
- Who is the target audience? Is it an international audience?
- What is the purpose of this material?
- Who is in charge of this project?
- What is my deadline?
- What graphics will be included with the text?
- Does the tone align with the company's brand and voice?
- Is the trademark/service mark used?
- Are the terms and vocabulary appropriate for the audience?
- If the content requires reader action, are steps in order of their execution?

And Now . . .

Getting into the field of editing for companies will provide you with many opportunities to expand your business. According to Ogi Djuraskovic in "How Many Websites Are There?—The Growth of The Web (1990–2021)," (https://firstsiteguide.com/how-many-websites/) as of June 18, 2021, over 1.86 billion websites are online. Almost two *billion* websites populate the internet! And every one of them needs an editor. You can be that editor.

This lesson has introduced you to what is involved in editing business content. Now you are prepared for the job. So . . . go forth and edit!

Conclusion

We've come to the end of our time together in Nonfiction Editing 201. We've covered a lot of ground. I hope you will take what you've learned from these lessons and broaden your scope of nonfiction editing.

I've included a list of additional resources to help you learn more and grow your business acumen.

<div align="center">

*** * ***

</div>

Notes

1. Mary Johnson, *The Art of Editing for the Corporate Market* (New York: EFA, 2010).
2. Ibid.
3. Suzanne Choney, "No Googling, Says Google—Unless You Really Mean It," *NBC News*, March 26, 2013, https://www.nbcnews.com/technology/no-googling-says-google-unless-you-really-mean-it-1C9078566
4. Johnson, *The Art of Editing for the Corporate Market.*

Resources

- Gerald J. Alred, Charles T. Brusaw, and Walter E. Oliu, *The Handbook of Technical Writing* (Bedford/St. Martin's), 2015.
- Johndan Johnson-Eilola and Stuart A. Selber, eds., *Solving Problems in Technical Communication* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 2013.
- Carolyn D. Rude and Angela Eaton, *Technical Editing*, 5th Edition, The Allyn & Bacon Series in Technical Communication (Pearson), 2010.
- Society of Technical Communications, https://www.stc.org/.

LESSON #8 ASSIGNMENT

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

Access the Word file Nonfiction Editing Lesson 8 Assignment.