



FREELANCE EDITING 101

Instructor: Erin K. Brown

LESSON #2

Types of Clients

An editorial freelancer may work with several different types of clients. For example:

WRITERS/AUTHORS

- The one-time writer
- The aspiring writer
- The beginning writer
- The intermediate author
- The established author

PUBLISHERS

- The subsidy publisher
- The standard publishing house

SMALL BUSINESSES

- Publishing-industry related
- Not related to the publishing industry

Different clients will have differing needs. For example:

Writers/Authors

The one-time (usually self-publishing) writer may want you to just fix the manuscript for him. He doesn't want to know what you changed or why; he doesn't want to be embarrassed by mistakes found by his readers after his book comes out in print.

The aspiring writer is wondering, *Do I have what it takes to be a successful author?* This client is looking for reassurance from a professional in the publishing field that it's worth his or her time and effort to continue to pursue writing. Encouragement and overall direction are more important than specific corrections to the manuscript.

The beginning writer wants to learn writing techniques. If you make a correction or suggestion on the manuscript, this client will want an explanation for why you recommended that change. Clients like this will want to learn from your edits so they can improve their writing skills. (I

have prepared several flyers describing various writing techniques—point of view, active versus passive verbs, citing sources, descriptions, dialogue, etc.—which I send with manuscripts that have those particular problems.)

The intermediate author already understands basic writing techniques but needs help polishing his or her manuscript for publication. This usually includes a line-by-line copyedit, showing where the writing could be made tighter/stronger, redundancies eliminated, etc. Your edit may mean the difference between rejection and acceptance for a writer at this level.

Established authors sometimes hire freelance editors to help them figure out how they can make their manuscripts even better. They may be in transition from one genre to another (for example, nonfiction to fiction, light romance to heavy drama, or mainstream fiction to mystery or science fiction/fantasy). Or they may want to make sure their manuscripts are extra clean to continue impressing their agents or in-house editors at their publishers.

Publishers

Subsidy Publishers

Some self-publishing companies don't offer any editorial services to their clients. Whatever a writer wants to publish, they'll print. However, most offer clients at least basic proofreading, just enough so the author won't be embarrassed when the book comes out in print. Many of these publishers offer editing for an extra fee. Sometimes this is a flat fee; other times, the cost is dependent on the level of editing required/requested.

Commercial Publishers

Most royalty-paying publishing houses hire both proofreaders and editors. Some use only in-house, full-time employees. Others use freelancers exclusively, while some use a combination of the two.

Usually, a manuscript will first be assigned to a content editor, who will do a basic, overall critique of the manuscript's strengths and weaknesses.

Next, the author will be assigned to an editor, who does a line-by-line copyedit, helping the author figure out how to strengthen the weak areas flagged by the content editor as well as offering additional recommendations. The editor goes through the manuscript with a fine-tooth comb, catching any mistakes or inaccuracies the author didn't notice and making sure the manuscript follows the publisher's guidelines and standards. The editor collaborates with the author, partnering with him in preparing the manuscript for production. This collaboration may include consultation on points of dispute. The author may insist on keeping a section the way it was originally written while the editor may believe that change or rewriting is essential. If possible, such disagreements should be resolved between the author and the editor, with the editor keeping in mind that it's the author's name that will be on the cover, not his own. If the issue cannot be resolved, it should be brought to the attention of the publisher/project manager, who will make the final decision.

Before an edited manuscript goes to print, it receives a final proofreading. Some publishers hire three or four proofreaders to make sure there are no mistakes in the finished product. These

proofreaders use standard proofreading marks (which we'll discuss in more detail in a later lesson) or proofread on a PDF.

This editing and proofreading are part of the publication process, and the author isn't charged for it.

This is an excellent article that explains the differences between vanity/subsidy publishers: <https://www.sfw.org/other-resources/for-authors/writer-beware/vanity/>.

Small Businesses

Publishing-Industry Related

Businesses related to the publishing industry (such as post-production publicists) also want their material to be free of typos and errors in punctuation, usage, grammar, and spelling. They may hire a proofreader, editor, and/or copywriter to assist in preparing promotional pieces to advertise published books.

Not Related to the Publishing Industry

Many small businesses hire freelancers to write, proofread, and/or edit promotional pieces such as flyers, ads, brochures, or websites. Like the one-time writer, this client will probably trust you to fix the material. They don't usually want to know what you changed or why; they just don't want to be embarrassed by mistakes found by potential customers. Small businesses also sometimes hire freelancers for desktop publishing, database maintenance, flyer distribution, copywriting, etc.

Challenging Clients

You will discover that there are myriad personalities and types of clients. You'll likely realize most clients are willing to learn and want to work well with you. Unfortunately, some are difficult and not as easy to work with.

No matter what, always respond in a positive manner. Always be kind, be clear, be concise, and be careful. Never engage in an email war or try to win an argument. It is unlikely that a challenging client will understand your point. So it is usually best to respond with "I'm not the right editor for you."

[Communicating with Clients 101](#) has some great information about—you guessed it—*communication*. In Lesson 4, the instructor (Jenne Acevedo) lists some of the most common situations editors encounter. She's permitted me to include her list here.

Each type of client includes a list of characteristics. The characteristics won't be the same for everyone and won't all pertain to each person. Some characteristics may seem contradictory, but people act in odd ways when they give you their precious projects to revise.

The lists of suggestions will also not apply to each client, but they are there to give you ideas for ways to approach the client. Use the ones you like and ignore the ones you are not comfortable trying. Provide the best professional advice and service to each client regardless of their issues.

The Indifferent Client

Characteristics

- He doesn't have much of an opinion on the type of edit. He just wants it reviewed.
- He will leave all the decisions up to you and pay what you ask.
- He is glad to get the work done but not overly appreciative.
- He may or may not get back to you in a timely manner.
- He won't ask questions about your comments.
- He probably won't answer most of your questions via email. He may get to one or two, but the rest are up to you.
- He'll probably just accept your changes without reviewing them.

Suggestions

- Give him the details he needs but nothing more.
- Don't ask him too many questions. He doesn't want to be bothered.
- Don't give him options unless necessary.
- Do the work, return it, and move on with little expectations.

The Unresponsive Client

Characteristics

- She is too busy to respond to *all* of your emails.
- She contacts you sporadically to begin a project but doesn't get back to you about the details, timing, pricing, or contract.
- She comes back to you much later and asks the status but then is quiet for a long time.
- She doesn't answer many questions, if at all.

Suggestions

- Once you see a pattern of her lack of responsiveness, stop any work or scheduling of the project, even if she has paid.
- Let her know you will not be able to continue the edit until she responds to your questions.
- Give her a deadline to respond, and tell her what you will do after it passes.
- Always follow through. Don't keep changing your mind or giving too many chances.
- Be as gracious as possible, but do not let her dictate your process.
- Be very clear about your expectations so she cannot come back and say you didn't follow through.

The Client Who Constantly Changes His Mind or the Schedule

Characteristics

- He sends lots of emails, even several each day.
- He's not sure what he wants, and then he makes a decision only to change it again.
- He gives you a projected date but doesn't make any strides to get back to you in time.
- He always has an excuse about why something didn't work or needed to be changed *again*.

Suggestions

- Try to identify him early.

- Stick to the emails in order, and hold him accountable to his word.
- Be clear that there will be an additional charge to make the changes if you've already done work one way.
- Make your schedule clear up front, and let him know that his editing changes or schedule changes affect your estimated completion.
- Don't hold off on other projects to keep making changes to his. Push his project back due to his changes to keep your other clients on track.

The Client Who Tells You How to Edit

Characteristics

- She sends a lengthy email introducing herself and her requirements.
- Her emails are redundant to make sure you get it.
- Her style sheet is twenty pages long *with references*.
- She provides a color-coded sample of what to review, what to provide suggestions for, and what to leave as is.
- She wants you to leave her ellipses, emoticons, and exclamation points. She knows it's not the norm but she doesn't care.
- She doesn't appreciate your suggestions and can tell you why she is right and you are wrong.
- Her friend/mom/sister/cousin/teacher said it was great and not to change a thing.
- She disagrees with *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, *The Christian Writer's Manual of Style*, and *The Chicago Manual of Style*.
- She wants to self-publish and will do the rest on her own. Just do exactly what she tells you to do.

Suggestions

- Only work with this client if you can handle it.
- Let her know what you will or will not do based on your experience and requirements.
- Clarify her requests in writing to maintain good records.
- Do your best to do exactly what she pays for. Don't worry about the rest.
- Do not do anything you are not comfortable with. It's better to give the job away than to be frustrated throughout the project.
- Provide industry-standard references at her request or as you feel the need to advise.
- Always be able to back up why you make a change or suggestion.

The Undecided Client

Characteristics

- He doesn't know what he's going to do with the completed manuscript.
- He doesn't understand the editing process or types of edits.
- He's not sure if he can afford the edit.
- He's not sure he needs *you* to edit. His friend might be enough.
- He takes a long time to figure out what he wants.
- He's not sure if he's a writer, but his friends told him to publish.

Suggestions

- Don't spend lots of time on this one.
- Only begin when you are confident he is ready.

The Client Who Won't Budge

(Similar to "The Client Who Tells You How to Edit.")

Characteristics

- She returns your editorial agreement with several changes for *you* to agree to.
- She digs her heels in and won't let you change anything.
- She is offended by your changes.
- She calls you names or compares you to something offensive.
- She wants a full or partial refund or wants you to do something else for free.

Suggestions

- You may not figure her out until you've already started or even finished the edit.
- Be as patient as you can but stay confident. You are the professional.
- Try not to let her rile you. It's her issue, not yours.
- Stop the edit and refer her elsewhere if possible.

The Corner Evangelist Client

Characteristics

- He wants to know how often you attend church, pray, and read your Bible.
- He wants to know your opinion on the tribulation or differences between denominations.
- He emails "helpful" information for you to understand the true message of God because he cares about you.
- He scoured your website to make sure you believe the right things before working with him.
- His interpretation of Scripture is not to be questioned.
- He makes it clear that he has lots of experience and education in theology, much more than you do.
- He thinks your suggested changes go directly against Scripture.

Suggestions

- Run, if you can.
- Stay away from fanatical clients. Rarely are they looking out for your best interest.
- Watch for red flags in his emails.
- Do not engage in any theological discussions or email questionnaires.
- Let him know you are not the right editor for him, then provide other options.
- Do not point out your concerns or reasons for not working with him unless you feel comfortable doing so. He could begin to rant.
- Simply keep it positive and wish him well.

The Client Who Doesn't Like Anything You Do

(Similar to "The Client Who Tells You How to Edit.")

Characteristics

- Your services were just for a quick check to dot the i's and cross the t's.
- She found two things you missed and wants to know how you call yourself an editor when she found what you didn't.
- She likes her work just as it is and takes offense to any changes that are not black and white.
- She doesn't want you to continue and won't pay anything else.
- She wants a refund for your work.

Suggestions

- Try not to take it personally. She probably isn't happy with anyone.
- Stand your ground about who you are and what you do. You are a professional.
- Apologize for the confusion, even if you don't think you were wrong. After all, she *was* confused about something regardless of how.
- Don't refund her money unless you think you were wrong or feel strongly about it.
- Refer her elsewhere, if needed, and wish her well.

The Client Who Doesn't Want to Pay for Your Completed Services (Other clients may have this as a characteristic.)

Characteristics

- God told him what to write, and you shouldn't have changed it.
- He refuses to cut words. They are all God ordained.
- He just wanted a quick proofread.
- He wants you to make changes for free.
- He will be very clear about telling you why you are wrong and why he is right.

Suggestions

- Do not engage in a discussion. Send one brief response email.
- Do not refund his money unless you have specific reasons to do so.
- Apologize for his frustration even if you don't feel like you did anything wrong.
- Provide resources to find another editor and wish him well.

The Pushy, Impatient Client

Characteristics

- She tells you she needs the manuscript completed in one week.
- She sends repeated emails to ask about the status.
- She finds your phone number and leaves several messages.
- She sends more money than needed just so you hurry up.
- She takes a long time to pay you but expects you to complete the project by the original date.

Suggestions

- Don't change your schedule because of her.
- Give her clear dates for your plan.
- Set up clear expectations regarding your communication, what you will and will not do. Perhaps you only wish to communicate via email or you need her to *stop* emailing so much.
- Explain that you run your business this way to work effectively with all clients.
- Offer to send a status update once a week if you can do so.

The Client Who Does Not Understand the Difference between Writing and Speaking

Characteristics

- He has been a pastor and speaker for twenty years.
- He has a platform and needs a book to sell at his events.
- He wants to put all of his ideas and past sermons in a book.
- He writes like he speaks.
- He is very passionate, with a great message, but needs some refining.
- His writing is redundant.
- He is willing to learn.

Suggestions

- Provide resources for him to learn the difference.
- Create a tip sheet if needed.
- Teach during the edit to help him understand.
- Be patient during the process. He will get it eventually.
- Make a list of suggested changes in voice and structure. Ask if he would like to make the changes first or have them changed during the edit. Note if the price changes for you to do them.

The First-Time Writer

Characteristics

- Her writing is poor. She doesn't understand basic techniques but thinks it's great.
- She knows she needs a *little* help but has no idea how much or what kind.
- She is fine with your suggestions as long as they don't change *too* much.
- She has friends who have told her what to expect and how to publish, so she is confident.
- She may or may not be willing to learn.
- She has grand visions of her face in a bookstore window.

Suggestions

- Be patient during the process. She may need lots of help.
- Provide resources for her to learn writing techniques.
- Recommend a writers' group, writers' conference, or critique partner.
- Create a tip sheet if needed.
- Teach during the edit to help her understand.
- Explain the editing process more clearly to her, and give her a correct picture of the industry. Be careful to not ruin her dreams, but give her some perspective.

The Ideal Client

(Yes, they do exist.)

Characteristics

- He knows he needs help and wants you to refine his manuscript, offer suggestions, and help him throughout the process.
- He is incredibly appreciative of your time and comments. He looks forward to digging in, making changes, and getting it back to you for another review.
- He answers questions promptly and asks clarifying questions to be proactive.
- He pays in advance via your preferred method of payment.
- He checks in occasionally to see how it's going.
- He is patient, kind, and clear in his requests and responses, even if you delay.
- He lets you know he's praying for you in every email he sends.
- He thanks you in his acknowledgments with a complimentary recommendation.

Suggestions

- Thank God for him.
- Pray for more like him.

(Hopefully, most of your clients will be more like him than the others!)

* * *

LESSON #2 ASSIGNMENTS

To obtain a Certificate of Completion for this course, you must complete at least three of the following assignments.

Assignment #1

Write about your ideal client. Who is it? What type of person/organization are they? Write a profile for this client or a paragraph explaining why this client is ideal for you and why you want to focus on obtaining this type of client.

Assignment #2

List the different types of clients discussed in the lesson. Write the pros and cons of working with each type of client (from your perspective). For example, if you were to work for an aspiring writer, what would be your pros and cons for working with that type of client?

Assignment #3

Read the article “Vanity/Subsidy Publishers” at <https://www.sfw.org/other-resources/for-authors/writer-beware/vanity/> and answer the following questions:

- Is there a cost to *traditional* publishing? Explain.
- Is there a difference between vanity and subsidy publishing? Explain.
- What are two ways vanity publishers try to “hide” their fees?
- How can you encourage your clients to do their due diligence when considering publishers?
- In your opinion, what are the two biggest warning signs about a potential vanity publisher?

Assignment #4

Share a difficult experience with a client that turned out well or share an experience with a client that did not end well. If you do not have a client experience to share, explain what your biggest concern is when dealing with a difficult client and what you have learned in this course that will help you if it ever happens.