FREELANCE EDITING 101

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LESSON #6

Tips for Editing Nonfiction

In addition to the areas mentioned in the last lesson, you should look for specific items when editing a nonfiction manuscript.

The Beginning

The beginning of a nonfiction book should draw the reader in by presenting a problem or need that readers can relate to, letting the readers know that the author has learned the solution to this problem, and promising to let them in on what he or she has discovered.

The beginning should also include some information about the author that will assure readers that the answers that are going to be presented have merit. What qualifies this person to write a book on this subject? Education? Experience? Research?

Authors may also want to share some personal things about themselves that will endear the readers to them, but these should be kept to a minimum, preferably only things that directly relate to the topic of the book.

Carefully study the first chapter of your client's manuscript. If it doesn't have all of the above elements, suggest the author add them.

The Middle

After the problem has been presented, the author needs to start delivering on his or her promise to address the problem right away. Information should be presented logically, in a natural progression that keeps the reader interested. Practical suggestions should be given along the way that readers can implement right away, even before they finish reading the book.

The Ending

Did the author deliver on the promise made at the beginning? If a solution to a problem was promised, make certain the author has presented the solution clearly and thoroughly. When a reader has finished a nonfiction book, he or she should feel encouraged and uplifted. Readers should feel glad they spent the time to read that book and confident that they can solve this

particular problem in their lives by applying what they read. If the ending doesn't end on a positive note, encourage the author to rewrite.

Organization

Make sure the material presented is well organized in such a way that one point leads naturally to the next. The author shouldn't jump around from one subject to another and back again.

Encourage the author to use headings and subheadings. Readers like to have topical subheadings that divide the text into manageable chunks.

Make sure *everything* under a subheading applies to that subject. If reorganizing is needed, recommend it.

Look at every section of the manuscript and ask, "Does this need to be here? Does it fit with the theme and purpose and topic? Does it present new information? Or is this just restating something the author has already gone over in a different section?" If similar information is presented elsewhere in the book, suggest the author either combine the two sections or take out one or the other.

Check Each Chapter

Does each chapter open with something that gives a clear idea of what the chapter is going to be about? Is each chapter opening intriguing, something that will entice the casual reader to keep reading?

Are chapter titles descriptive and appropriate to the subject discussed in each chapter?

Does each chapter end with a summary of the material presented in the chapter?

Check Each Sentence

Watch for weak sentence beginnings. Eliminate unnecessary preliminaries such as:

- "As a matter of fact . . ." (If it wasn't fact, it shouldn't be there.)
- "As far as I'm concerned . . ."
- "For the most part . . ."
- "It is interesting to note that . . ." or "Interestingly . . ." or "Incidentally . . ." If what the author is about to say *isn't* interesting or incidental to the subject, it shouldn't be there.

Anecdotes

Nonfiction can come alive when the author uses anecdotes to illustrate the points. Anecdotes are short personal stories about a real-life person (often with the name changed) or a "composite" person. Something that happens to a lot of people can be told from the perspective of a single character with a fictitious name. Something along the lines of "Sally had to fight with her three-year-old, Jimmy, to take a bath every night." The author may not know anyone named Sally or Jimmy. But what young mother *hasn't* had to fight with her kid to take a bath?

Anecdotes are best told with realistic dialogue, brief but vivid descriptions, and characters the reader can relate to.

Names should be used in anecdotes. Don't let the author just say, "a couple I knew once" and then refer to them as "the couple" over and over. Not only is it repetitious but it feels detached and made-up instead of personal and real. Make a list of all the names the author used for anecdotes. If the same name is used for two different people (or fictitious characters), encourage the author to rename one. If the people's names are real, add a last name or the first initial of a last name (such as "Karen B." and "Karen W.") or a middle name ("Courtney Rae" and "Courtney Elizabeth").

Some brief descriptions should be woven into the anecdotes in small bits and pieces. Details should be used sparingly and only as they fit the point being made.

Make sure the author's anecdotes illustrate the points he or she is trying to make. No matter how "cute" the story is, if it's not relevant to the theme of the chapter or section it's in, suggest the author move it or take it out.

If you can see where a good story would illustrate the point the author is trying to make, suggest he or she put one in. If the author seems to have too many stories, suggest the author cut some.

Point Out Repetition

Authors tend to repeat themselves—especially those who do a lot of speaking because speakers are *encouraged* to repeat important themes in their messages. But in writing, if something has already been said once, it doesn't need to be stated again.

Look for sentences that begin with "Again," "As stated previously," "As you will recall," "The point I'm trying to make," etc.

The Obvious

Watch for sentences that start with phrases like "As we all know . . ." and "It's obvious that . . ." If we all know, or it's that obvious, the author probably doesn't need to point it out.

Push and Pressure

Keep a lookout for words like *should* and *must* and *ought* and *need*. Readers don't like to be told what they *have* to do. Encourage the author to cite statistics and to describe the research done and personal observations. The author may share his or her own story, telling what he or she has done, what happened as a result, and what was learned. Then let readers come to their own conclusions about what they "should" or "must" do.

Where such demanding/insistent words are needed, suggest the author use inclusive phrases like "We all need to . . ."

Balance
Look for a balance of (1) anecdotes, (2) descriptions of the problems, (3) statistics (4) quotes from other sources, (5) descriptions of the solution, and (6) suggested applications of the solution.

Consistency
Books of the Bible should be spelled out in the text but may be abbreviated in parenthetical references. If this is done, make sure it's done that way in *all* references in parentheses.

Quoting from Other Sources
Whenever a book, article, poem, drama, song, database, or illustration appears in tangible form, it is automatically covered by copyright, regardless of whether the work is published or registered with the copyright office. No one can use another person's material (or any portion thereof) publicly without the copyright owner's express permission except under two circumstances: fair use and public domain.

Fair Use
"Fair use" allows limited reprinting of copyrighted material under certain conditions. This is mainly determined by how the work is used, how much of the work is used, and how the use affects the potential sales of the original work. If an author has brief quotes from a few published works in the manuscript, and these quotations will not negatively affect the sales of those books, he or she probably does not need to obtain permission. However, if there are lengthy quotations, or the quoted material is the vast majority of the work, or the comments made about that material could be harmful to the original author's profits from that book, let your client know that he or she will need to secure written permission from the copyright holder.

This is the author's job, not the publisher's job (or yours).

Music
Other than private in-home listening and playing, fair use of music is extremely limited. An author can refer to the *title* of a song but cannot reprint the music or lyrics (unless it's in the public domain) without written permission from the copyright holder (which is usually a very time-consuming and expensive process).

If a client insists on using music lyrics, suggest he or she just give the title (if it's a well-known song) or paraphrase the meaning of the lyrics in his or her own words. Share the article [“How to Legally Quote Song Lyrics in Your Book”](#) with your clients.

Public Domain
When a copyright expires, the owner no longer has exclusive rights. Some authors and composers relinquish their copyright and give their material to the public, either during their lifetimes or at their deaths.

An author may use public domain material only if he or she has a legitimate source of proof (e.g., a tangible original or copy of the work with a copyright date old enough to be in the public domain).

Copyright Term and the Public Domain in the United States has some detailed charts on how to figure out when or whether a work is available in the public domain, and The Online Books Page offers a search tool to look up when a book was published. The combination of these two sources could be a good way to determine if a particular book is in the public domain.

A listing of "public domain" songs can be found at http://pdinfo.com.

Citing Sources

Whether the material requires permission, whenever someone else's words are quoted or even paraphrased, the author must provide a proper citation for the source in a bibliography or footnote. This not only gives credit to the original author but also enables a reader to locate the source of the quote. Providing references lends credibility to the work. If an author does not give credit to the work of others, he or she is committing plagiarism. Therefore, make sure your client provides full citations to all sources used, including the following:

- books
- articles
- internet sources
- Scripture verses
- interviews
- government documents
- nonprint media (videotapes, audiotapes, pictures, and images)
- software

NOTE: Commonly known facts, available in numerous sources, do not need to be enclosed in quotation marks or given a source citation unless the wording is taken directly from another work. (For example, "Abraham Lincoln was assassinated on April 14, 1865" does not need a footnote.)

However, *all* statistics must be backed up by citing a legitimate source. Watch out for phrases like "Research indicates . . ." and "Experts have found . . ." and "Sources state that . . ." or any percentage. Such phrases are *big* red flags indicating the author is trying to substantiate a claim that he or she has not researched to find a source from an expert.

"Fifty percent of all marriages end in divorce" is my biggest pet peeve in this area. Pastors and other church leaders have been spouting that alleged statistic for years. But where did it come from? What does it even mean? Half of all marriages since the beginning of time have already ended in divorce? A proper statistic will include details like when a survey was taken, how many people were involved, what their demographics were, and who conducted the survey.

Make sure the author has cited the correct sources for *all* quotations and statistics. Also make sure he or she has included all the necessary publication information in a footnote, endnote, or bibliography.

NOTE: Although many people access Wikipedia for research information, it is not considered a valid source by most publishers. Also know that numerous websites have quotations without citing the original sources. Citing a website that doesn't cite the original source is not sufficient for a book's or article's footnote.

Endnotes, Footnotes, and Bibliographies

Formats for documenting sources vary somewhat from publisher to publisher. Most use one of two systems—endnotes or footnotes—sometimes accompanied by a bibliography.

Endnotes

Endnotes are placed at the back of a book, after any appendix material and before the bibliography. They are arranged by chapter. The chapter number or title or both must be given.

Most publishers prefer endnotes over footnotes unless there are only one or two notes in the whole book. One advantage of endnotes is that the length of each note is not a great concern, since notes and text need not be jumbled about to make them fit on the same printed page.

Footnotes

References are cited in the text by number, rather than at the end of the book. The reference numbers in the text are placed in parentheses (12) or square brackets [12] or are set as superscript figures (^{12}). If automatic formatting is used, additions and deletions can be made without manually changing numbers in both text references and the footnotes.

Wherever possible, a note number should come at the end of a sentence, or at least at the end of a clause. Preferably, the note number follows a quotation, whether the quotation is short and runs into the text or long and set off from the text. Occasionally it may be inserted after an author's name or after text introducing the quotation.

Bibliographies

A list of books and other references used by an author in a scholarly work may be placed at the end of the book, before the index. In a work containing many footnotes or endnotes, a bibliography in addition to the notes can be a useful device for the reader and an economical one for the author and publisher. Full particulars for each source need appear only in the bibliography; therefore, citations in the notes may be considerably shortened or abbreviated.

Formatting

For detailed instructions on formatting endnotes, footnotes, and bibliographies, see the guidelines in *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Here are a few highlights.

What to Include

For Books

The following information should be included (in this order):

Author: full name of author or authors; full name of editor or editors if no single author is listed; or name of institution responsible for the writing of the book.

Title: full title of the book, including subtitle if there is one.

Editor, compiler, or translator, if any, and if in addition to listed author (may be located in author's position if no author is listed).

Edition, if not the first.

Volumes, total number if multivolume work is referred to as a whole. Volume number of multivolume work if single volume is cited. Title of individual volume, if applicable.

Series title, if applicable, and volume number within series.

Facts of publication: city, publisher, and date.

> ***Page number(s)***, or volume and page number(s), if applicable.
> ***A URL*** for internet sources.

Examples of Book References:
> Maria Jones and Theresa Anderson, *Women in America* (Hicksville, NJ: Revell, 1973), 131–35.

> James Smith, ed., *My Journals* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), vol. 1, 354.

NOTE: Do not use p. or pp. for page numbers.

For Articles
The following information should be included (in this order):
> Author's or authors' name(s)
> Title and subtitle of article
> Title of periodical
> Issue information (volume, issue number, date, etc.)
> Page reference (where appropriate)
> For online periodicals, a URL (if time-sensitive data, include date accessed)

Examples of Article References:
> Jim Harris, "The Problem with Teenagers," *Publishers Weekly*, June 10, 1973, 34–35.

> Jessica Reaves, "A Weighty Issue: Ever-Fatter Kids," interview with James Rosen, *Time*, March 14, 2001, http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,102443,00.html.

For Websites
The following information should be included (if available):
> Author's or authors' name(s)
> Title and subtitle of article
> Title of periodical (if applicable)
> Issue information (volume, issue number, date, etc.)
> URL

Examples of Website References:
> Mark Warr, "Rethinking Social Reactions to Crime," *American Journal of Sociology* 106, no. 3 (2000), under "The Consequences of Fear," www.journals.uchicago.edu/AJS/issues/v106n3.html.

> Lawrence Osborne, "Poison Pen," *Salon,* March 29, 2000, accessed July 10, 2001, http://www.salon.com/books/it/2000/ 03/29/kaplan/index.html.

NOTE: A footnote should always have a period at the end, even if it's a Scripture reference.

Scripture Quotations
If the manuscript contains Scripture quotes, check them against the original to make sure they've been quoted accurately. (If the manuscript contains a lot of quotations, ask the author if he or she

wants you to spend the time to double-check them. If the author hesitates, offer to spot-check. If several mistakes are found, the client may be willing to spend the extra money to have you proofread them, or he or she may put in the time to double-check them him- or herself.)

If you're not sure which version was used, ask. The author will need to identify the version prior to publication anyway. The most-often-used version can be identified at the beginning of the manuscript with "Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from . . ." (followed by the appropriate copyright notice). Other versions used should also be identified with "Quotations marked NIV [for example] are taken from . . ." Secondary versions must be identified following the Scripture reference: "John 3:16 NKJV," for example. (Note: no comma between reference and version.)

Every direct quotation must be accompanied by a reference to the applicable book, chapter, and verse. If something in the text sounds like a Scripture quote, recommend the author insert the reference.

Check every word and every punctuation mark for accuracy. Quotations must appear exactly as they appear in the version used, except for the following:

- Words that are italicized (when they were added by the translator for clarity rather than emphasis) are not italicized in the quotation.
- Small caps for Lord and God should be replaced by initial caps (Lord and God) in books written in a familiar or popular vein. (In scholarly works, quotations should follow the typographical rendering of the original.)
- Introductory words such as *And*, *Or*, *For*, *Therefore*, *But*, and *Verily* may be omitted.

If the author wishes to add or change an occasional word for clarity's sake, brackets must be used to indicate the change.

Some books of the Bible, in some versions, have each verse set on a separate line, with each line beginning with a capital letter. These verses, when quoted, should not be set as separate paragraphs but should run together. Actual paragraph breaks are indicated by the paragraph symbol (¶). Words that would not be capitalized if they were not at the beginning of a line should be lowercased when quoted.

When words within a quoted sentence are deleted, use ellipsis points (. . .). Ellipsis points are not needed at the beginning or end of a quotation if it represents a complete thought. If a quoted portion might be confusing to the reader without an ellipsis, go ahead and use one.

Except for Bible studies in which it is important to distinguish where each verse begins and ends, numbers should not be included within the quotations. With this same exception, there is no need to add a letter at the end of a reference to indicate that only a part of the verse referenced has been quoted (John 3:16a, for example).

Formatting Scripture Quotes

When a verse is quoted within the text, the reference may be given within the context of the sentence. For example:

> My favorite Bible verse, John 3:16, says, "For God so loved the world . . ."

If the version needs to be identified, it may be added at the end of the quote, in parentheses, before the ending punctuation for the sentence.

> John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (NKJV).

If the reference follows the quote in parentheses, the ending punctuation comes after the closing parenthesis. Example:

> ". . . from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:37–39 NIV).

If the quotation contains a question mark or exclamation point, place it with the text, using the ending punctuation for the sentence it's in at the end.

> "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" (John 19:15).

Quotations longer than three or four lines should be block indented. The reference should be in parentheses after the ending punctuation or on the next line, right aligned, following an em dash. Example:

> . . . from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:37–39 NIV)

Formatting References

A comma followed by a space should be used to indicate a quotation of two *nonconsecutive* verses (John 3:16, 18).

An en dash should be used for consecutive verse numbers of the same chapter (John 3:16–18) or several chapters of a Bible book (Galatians 5:26–6:5).

Use a semicolon to separate citations taken from different chapters or books (John 3:16–17; 5:11 or John 3:16; Luke 11:5).

Some authors like to use a comma followed by a space to indicate a quotation of two consecutive verses (John 3:16, 17), but this is not in *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

NOTE: For a more in-depth study of nonfiction editing, see Nonfiction Editing 101, 201, 301, 401 at the PEN Institute.

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LESSON #6 ASSIGNMENTS

Choose four *of these assignments to complete to qualify for the Certificate of Completion.*

Assignment #1
I gave the following as examples of weak sentence beginnings:

- "As a matter of fact . . ."
- "As far as I'm concerned . . ."
- "For the most part . . ."
- "It is interesting to note that . . ." or "Interestingly . . ." or "Incidentally . . ."

Can you think of any others?

Assignment #2
Think of an old song you like and do a search (by library or internet or some other means) to determine if it is in public domain. If it is not in public domain, determine who the copyright holder is and how you could contact that person/organization to request permission to quote the lyrics.

Assignment #3
Assuming you wanted to use the lyrics to a popular song in a manuscript, think of how you could reword that section to let the reader know what song was being referred to (without using the actual lyrics).

Assignment #4
If you received a manuscript from a client that had a lot of song lyrics, how would you word a response to that client, letting him or her know about copyright laws for music?

Assignment #5
Think of a popular saying you like and research to determine who originally came up with that saying.

Assignment #6
Share a favorite passage from a published book, article, and/or web page, and include the footnote, endnote, or bibliography reference in the proper format.

Assignment #7
Think of a statistic you've heard or read (like "Fifty percent of all marriages end in divorce") and research to find a source to back it up. Then reword the quote to include the appropriate details and write a footnote or endnote with the substantiation details.

Assignment #8

Share one of your favorite Bible verses, including the appropriate reference (and version) in the proper format. Do one short verse within the text of a sentence and then do one longer verse that's block indented. Make sure you format the ending punctuation properly.