



SUBSTANTIVE EDITING FOR FICTION 301

Instructor: Karin Beery

LESSON #3

Getting the Job

It doesn't matter how good you are at substantive edits—if you can't get the job, you're not going to help anyone (or make any money!). In this lesson we're going to look at how to find potential clients, how to communicate with them, how to highlight your services, and more.

Some specific things we'll look at include the following:

- Leads
- Bids
- Sample Edits and Writing Assessments
- Style Sheets
- Setting Rates
- Agreements/Contracts

This lesson is a bit shorter than the others, as I want to give you time to work on creating the documents we'll be talking about. For each of these, I'll give you definitions and examples, but you'll learn the most by creating these documents for yourself (which will help prepare you for when you contact that first potential client!).

Leads

In business, a lead is “someone who matches the criterion the salesperson has established and who has the need, reason and/or interest in pursuing the product”

(<https://www.thebalance.com/what-is-a-lead-2917360>).

It's not enough to meet writers—some of them have no desire to publish their books. Nor is it enough to know people who plan to write someday. Those people are not good leads. In our line

of work, a good lead is someone who has a manuscript he or she wants to publish and *who understands the value of an editor*.

You will meet authors who want you to edit their 100,000-word manuscripts for \$500. You will also meet authors who argue with you about every suggestion you make. These people are not good leads because they don't understand the value of your services. They're often looking for the cheapest, quickest fixes for their books. That's not to say you can't or shouldn't work with them, but you should go into the relationship with your eyes open, knowing that it may be a struggle.

Instead, a good lead is someone who wants your input, considers your input, and is willing to pay fair compensation for your work. In my experience, most of those authors are already involved with and invested in their craft—they're members of different writing organizations and attendees at conferences. They aren't simply interested in publishing books; they want to publish *good* books.

How do you find these people?

For starters, make yourself visible. I've received several requests through my website. If you don't have a website, get one. Don't rely on social media accounts, because you never know when those will shut down or change algorithms, but do have a presence there to increase your exposure and the chance that people will find you (just make sure your social media accounts point people back to your website). The majority of my clients came to me from referrals through two main sources: personal contacts and the Christian Editor Connection.

Personal Contacts

Nothing beats word-of-mouth marketing, especially in an industry that's such a tight-knit community. Take some time to get to know people in the industry, but don't just pitch them your services. Take the time to get to *know* them, and let them get to know you. Join some of the same groups (professional or online) and get involved. Don't just be an editor; be a person. Then, when someone asks for an editor and you submit your bid, they won't feel like they're talking with a stranger. They also won't feel like you're only interested in them as a paycheck.

Christian Editor Network & Connection

Again, let me say that I'm *not* being paid to promote this. I'm just letting you know what's worked for me.

There are numerous places online where you can find jobs and bid on them—Upwork, Thumbtack, Craigslist, etc. Some people have a lot of luck with those sites, but not everyone does. One reason I think those sites can be tough to navigate is that they don't always require proof or references to substantiate your claims as a professional. Anyone can create an account and respond to an ad on Upwork or Craigslist, so how do authors know who they can trust?

Joining a group like the [Christian Editor Network](#) (CEN) is like having a referral from other professional editors. It's true that not every member has the same level of experience, but there is a certain level of investment and involvement required to maintain a listing. Once you have some

experience and satisfied clients, you can ask for testimonials and references; but when you're just starting out, it's invaluable to be able to say, "I'm an active member of the Christian Editor Network." It can be especially helpful if you take and pass the Christian Editor Connection tests, so you can say, "I'm a certified substantive fiction editor with the CEC."

Another such group is the Editorial Freelancers Association (EFA). This group also sends editorial leads to its members. The difference between the CEC and the EFA is the CEC editors must have two years of experience, complete the application process, and pass tests to qualify for membership. Also, CEC leads are only sent to the two to five editors who specifically qualify for a particular lead at any given time; EFA leads are sent to all EFA members. For more information on CEC, visit www.ChristianEditor.com; for more information on EFA, visit www.the-efa.org.

By making personal connections and affiliating yourself with an established, well-known professional association, you won't have to do all of the work to find leads. Authors will see your name and reach out to you, which will give you time to work on other things.

Bids

A bid letter is often your first contact with an author. He or she will reach out to you via your website, Facebook page, the CEC, etc. Your letter is your first impression, so you want to make sure it captures the author's attention while also showing all the different ways you can help clean up his or her manuscript.

A good bid letter includes:

- A brief introduction of who you are
- A brief look at your editorial experience
- A summary of what the client wants
- An explanation of how you can help the client accomplish his or her goal*
- An offer to do a free sample edit (optional)
- An explanation of how you work (contract, payment options, etc.)
- An explanation about the editing process (Microsoft Word, Track Changes, etc.)
- A note of thanks for the opportunity to bid on the project
- A signature line

*A bid letter is a marketing tool, and marketing isn't about you, it's about your clients. They don't care about your education or experience—they want to know how your education and experience are going to help them succeed.

This formula has helped many editors sign contracts with authors.

Not only is the formula successful but it can also be applied to all of the editorial services you provide. Rather than write a new letter every time you receive a contact, you can write and save bid letters for

- substantive fiction editing,
- line editing,
- proofreading,
- mentoring/coaching, and so on.

Sample Edits and Writing Assessments

The Sample Edit

The most effective way to demonstrate your editing skills (as well as get a good feel for the quality of an author’s work) is to offer a free sample edit. Here are a few things to consider before you start providing those samples:

- **Specify the formatting requirements.** Remember, if you’re not specific, you’ll get 8-point font, single-spaced with 0.5” margins!
- **Ask for the first pages.** Regardless of whether or not you offer to edit a chapter or three pages, always request the *first* pages. This is important because there are people out there who take advantage of free sample edits—they will send different pages to different editors until they’ve managed to secure a free, full-manuscript edit.
- **Only edit pages from the novel in question.** For the same reason listed above, don’t provide a free edit of someone’s flash fiction or short story. Not only could it be an attempt to secure a free edit, but it also won’t help you determine the level of work required on the novel you’ve discussed.
- **Look for strengths as well as weaknesses.** Editing is a funny business—people essentially pay you to point out all their mistakes. That’s not an easy job, and it can be difficult for authors to receive nothing but criticism. No matter how bad the manuscript is (and you’ll get some *bad* manuscripts), always look for the good and find ways to encourage the author. It may be difficult to find something positive to say in the edit; if that’s the case, include encouraging words in the writing assessment.

Sample edits are not required. I know several editors who don’t do them. I prefer to provide them for two main reasons:

1. **It introduces the author to my editing style.** I always try to be kind in my edits, but I am very direct—and not everyone appreciates that approach. Not every author will like my style, and that’s okay. The sample edit lets them see my style before they sign a contract so they can decide whether or not they want to work with me.
2. **It gives you a better idea of what’s involved.** When I provide a sample edit, I edit two to three pages but ask for the first three chapters so I can get a sense of the author’s voice and style. By reading all of those pages and starting the edit, I have a better sense of how much work will be involved, which allows me to provide a more accurate time and cost estimate to the author.

The Writing Assessment

After you finish the sample edit, I highly recommend including a writing assessment. The assessment is something to include in your response email. When you write it, remember to use the sandwich method: sandwich the criticism between two compliments.

I won't lie—sometimes you'll be hard-pressed to find anything good with a manuscript: the characters are flat and stereotypical, the plot feels contrived, the character interactions are melodramatic, and there are so many spelling and punctuation mistakes that it's hard to read the sample pages. Even if the story's that bad, you can *always* find something nice to say.

I'll often compliment the author on his hard work and determination not only to start the novel but also to finish it, then to be willing to let another person look at and criticize it. That's not an easy decision to make, and the number of poorly written self-published novels proves that many people are too afraid to do it.

After that, list everything that the author needs to work on. I also like to include the reason why it should be tweaked and a quick suggestion on how to fix that problem. This also demonstrates that I can not only find problems but also provide solutions. For example, the sample pages might include a lot of head-hopping. In the assessment I would write something like . . .

One issue that stood out was the inconsistent point of view. The scene started in one character's head, then jumped into three other characters' heads. (I point out the problem.) In a third-person POV story, you want to stay in one person's head throughout a chapter or scene (in which case you need a scene break). (I explain the broken rule.) Whoever you name first in a chapter is that chapter's POV character, so you'll want to write the whole chapter from that POV. (I give the solution.)

An important thing to remember when assessing the writing is to comment only on what you've read. Don't make assumptions about what you think will happen. Just comment on the sample pages. The main character may appear stereotypical in the first four pages, but that doesn't mean that everything about the character will be stereotypical throughout the novel. Something like that is worth pointing out to the author: *My first impression of the character is rather stereotypical. If that was your intent for the first impression, it's coming across well; if that wasn't your intent, you may want to rework some of his dialogue/mannerisms/reactions.*

Style Sheets

As I mentioned in the last lesson, style sheets help the author and editor maintain consistency throughout the manuscript. A copyediting or proofreading style sheet includes notes on style. When I talk about style, I mean today's writing rules and the methods used to implement those rules. Elements of style include

- spelling,
- capitalization,
- grammar,

- hyphenation,
- punctuation,
- abbreviations,
- syntax, and
- usage.

When you perform the first substantive edit on a manuscript, however, you aren't focusing on those things—and you don't want to. You could spend hours listing out all of the capitalization, spelling, and abbreviation rules referenced in the manuscript only to have the author delete every section where those items appear.

Instead, for a substantive edit, focus the style sheet on:

- Consistent characterization (physical appearance, name spelling, etc.)
- Spelling of unusual names or places
- Setting descriptions
- All named locations and characters

These are the types of things you'll watch for and note on the style sheet. Then, if you aren't the copyeditor for the project, you can send it to the author and the next editor for reference.

Setting Rates

There are several ways to determine rates, and there's no right or wrong way to do it, though some techniques work better than others. If you use per-word or per-page rates, you can give your clients a total price before you begin working; however, if you charge by the hour, you can only estimate how much to charge per project. Regardless of how you charge, be clear about what you will and won't do for the price you've quoted.

My substantive editing rate includes one read-through: I provide a full edit with a detailed writing assessment. If the author wants another read-through (after he's accepted/rejected changes and updated the manuscript), that's an additional charge (though you can include it in your initial bid if you know ahead of time that your author wants that option).

I work on a per-word basis for three main reasons:

- **I hate tracking hours.** I have a short attention span, so I'll often edit for forty-five minutes, take a break; edit for an hour, take a break; edit for fifteen minutes, then take a phone call. Keeping track of hours can be more stressful than the work itself, not to mention it takes time to track all those hours (though I never charge for that time, and I hear that some new programs will track hours for you).
- **The more experience I gain, the faster I edit.** It takes much less time to edit a manuscript today than it did five years ago, so why should I get paid less for the same amount of work? Authors aren't just paying me for my time; they're paying for my knowledge and experience. Per-page and per-word rates take that into consideration.

- **Authors can't mess with the word count to try to make the edit less expensive.** As I said earlier, there will always be those people who mess with document formatting to pay as little as possible for an edit. They'll send you the tiny fonts and tiny page margins and say their manuscript is only 175 pages. After you fix the formatting, however, you have to inform them that it's actually 225 pages. I prefer not to deal with that hassle, so I stick with the per-word count (though I know several people who do well with per-page rates).

There is no right or wrong amount to charge, but I do encourage editors to keep their rates open-ended so they don't put themselves in a tight spot. Each substantive edit will be different—some will require much more work than others. That's why I use starting rates: substantive edits start at \$0.04 per word, line edits start at \$0.02 per word, etc. That way you have some wiggle room to charge more if the manuscript will require more work than originally thought.

I charge the following rates for my services:

- Substantive/Developmental Edit: \$0.04/word and up
- Line Edit: \$0.03/word and up
- Critiques: \$2/page (based on 250 words per page, industry standard)

I base my rates on the word count that I get from Microsoft Word for the first draft. Yes, that word count includes chapter titles and title pages, and it should—I edit the formatting and spelling on all of those throughout the manuscript. With these rates already in place, it's easy to give a client an accurate quote.

How you collect payment is up to you, but I suggest you accept payment upfront—at the very least, you need to collect a 50 percent deposit before you begin the work and set a date when the final payment is due. If I know the client, I'll sometimes keep working while I wait for the final payment; if I don't personally know the client, I will wait to finish the project until I receive payment. Regardless, I *never* send back a manuscript until I have money in hand.

There have been times when authors want to hire me, but the \$2,000+ price tag is more than they can afford. In those cases, I always offer a payment plan, but I also make it clear when the work will be completed. If an author wants to send \$500 a month for four months, I'll either edit a quarter of the manuscript each month, or I'll wait until the full payment is received and do it all at once. I've never experienced this, but I know some editors who've set up similar plans then had authors stop paying after two payments. It can be a bit of an awkward situation, but if you set the schedule in advance and stick to it, you won't have wasted time editing pages you'll never get paid for.

Agreements/Contracts

Here's how it usually happens: an author doesn't know what edit she needs (either because she's not sure what each service includes or because she thinks the manuscript is in better shape than it really is). After I provide the sample edit and my editing suggestions, I'll ask for a full

manuscript so I can get the word count for myself. Yes, I base my rate on the exact number: 72,573 words, not 72,000 (or 70,000, as some people will estimate).

At that point, I can send the author an *exact* amount due and a relatively accurate estimate on how long it will take me to complete the edit. I like to edit only 4–6 hours a day (as I take time for social media, teaching classes, my own writing, etc.), and I like to give myself a couple of days of cushion (in case I get sick or something unexpected comes up). So for a 72,573-word manuscript, I would charge \$2,903 for a three-week edit.

If the author agrees to everything, I send an agreement (or contract) that spells out all of the specifics:

- What service I'm providing (including the definition/explanation that I sent to the author)
- How much money is due
- When the payment(s) is due
- How payment(s) can be made
- Editing format (e.g., using Track Changes in Microsoft Word)
- Due date
- Editing resources used

I also include the legalese—I make no promises of publication, I don't represent a publisher or editor, etc. I've included a copy of my agreement at the end of this lesson for your review. I'll often forgo an agreement for small jobs (less than \$50) or for people I know, but even among friends, I put together an agreement for anything more than \$100. No one's ever been offended by this practice (to my knowledge!), and it protects both of us in the end.

And that's it for this lesson! I hope you'll take advantage of the extra time to work through the assignments, which should help prepare you for when you start bidding on and winning gigs!



LESSON #3 ASSIGNMENTS

Create at least two templates for assignment #1 or complete one template and assignment #2 to earn your certificate for this class.

Assignment #1

Create templates for each of the following:

- Bid letter
- Style Sheet
- Rate Sheet
- Agreement/Contract

Assignment #2

If you didn't edit this clip last lesson, edit it this time. Once you finish, assess the writing for the author.

Kyle slammed his fist against the steering wheel. "Not now." He tried the key again. The engine whirled, but would not start. He popped the hood and lumbered out of the car. It was dark, it was windy and he had no idea what he was looking for, but it would make him feel better if he tried. He wasn't sure how long he had been staring at the intricate web of pipes and hoses before he heard the clicking of heels on pavement. Kyle glanced up at the woman before him.

She was tall and slender, her auburn hair pulled out of her eyes. She came from the same hotel as he, but he recognized her as an employee; he'd seen her many times during his frequent visits. However, as it was nearly midnight he was surprised to meet her in the parking lot, just leaving the Park Place Hotel.

"Need some help?" she asked politely.

"I'd like to say no, but I just can't get it to start," he confessed.

"It doesn't sound like anything more than a dead battery. You just need a jump."

"Well that doesn't sound too bad," Kyle smiled warmly. "Do you know how I can reach AAA or something similar?"

"Are you kidding?" the woman laughed. She approached Kyle and switched her bag to her left arm; she extended her right hand to him. "I'm Annie."

“Hi Annie, I’m Kyle. Why am I kidding?”

“AAA will fleece you! You can use my car,” she offered. “I won’t even charge you,” she winked.

“I don’t think I have the right wires for that,” explained Kyle. Annie laughed again. Was she really laughing at his plight? “Are you laughing at me?” He hadn’t yet decided if she was irritating or amusing.

“Nice shiny new BMW with no jumper cables,” she teased. There was no mistaking the taunting in her voice now.

“I guess I didn’t check the fine print on my options package. Can I get my car started now?”

“I’ll be right back.” Kyle smiled as she walked away. Her stride was confident and, he noted, quick for someone in heels. He watched her slide into a practical sedan. She pulled into the empty space beside him and popped her hood and trunk. The graceful, professional woman produced jumper cables and began connecting the two vehicles.

“Are you serious?” Kyle asked, watching her with a mixture of humor and admiration. “I’ve only ever seen 200 lb. men with exposed butt-cracks working in there.” Annie smiled up at Kyle and chuckled.

Sample Agreement

This agreement is between Karin Beery (“Editor”) and John Doe (“Client”) and concerns the following manuscript:

Author(s): John Doe

Working title: No, I Don’t Need an Editor

Length of manuscript: 89,483

1. EDITORIAL TASKS

The Editor agrees to do the following on the manuscript: developmental edit.

2. DELIVERY

The manuscript is to be delivered to the Editor by the Client on or before December 31, 2011 by means of e-mail. All editing will be done electronically.

3. PAYMENT

The agreed-upon editorial fee of \$3,000 is to be paid by the Client to the Editor in the following manner: \$1,000 deposit due with signed contract by November 3, 2011. Two additional payments of \$1,000 each are due by December 3, 2011 and December 31, 2011.

4. TERMINATION

This agreement may be terminated by either party in the event of material change of circumstance, with seven (7) days’s notice sent in writing to the other party at the address shown below. If the Editor terminates the agreement, the Editor will be paid by the Client for work done up to the date of termination. If the Client terminates the agreement, the Editor will be paid by the Client for the work done until termination or 50%, whichever amount is greater.

5. SPECIAL CLAUSES

The Editor will perform a chapter-by-chapter developmental edit, returning each chapter to the Client upon completion. Client will accept or reject edits and update each chapter as necessary, then return revised chapters to the Editor. The Editor will clean-up each revised chapter (removing Track Changes marks, correcting formatting issues, and responding to Client comments on the manuscript). The Editor will combine chapters to create one final document for the Client. Any additional editorial needs or requests beyond these services will be discussed and billed individually.

6. INDEMNITY

Editing is intrinsically a subjective process of offering advice and suggestions to the Client. In addition to offering such advice and suggestions, the Editor’s responsibility is limited to notifying the Client of any unresolved differences before the work proceeds to the next stage of production. While the Editor will make every effort to bring questionable material to the attention of the Client, the Client agrees to indemnify and save harmless the Editor from any and

all claims or demands, including legal fees, arising out of any alleged libel or copyright infringement committed by the Client in creating the work.

The Editor does not represent nor is she affiliated with any agent or publisher of literary works. The Editor makes no representations or warranties that she can or will attempt to have the manuscript published or aid in publishing the manuscript.

Editing a work of fiction is perhaps the most subjective activity possible in the field of literature. The Editor's sole function is to aid and assist the Client in editing the manuscript. In this light, the Editor will make her best efforts to advise and suggest changes to improve the manuscript. The decision to accept or reject the editor's suggestions is solely the Client's.

The Chicago Manual of Style will serve as the default style book unless the Client requests and supplies a different style book.

7. APPLICABLE LAWS

The terms of this agreement shall be interpreted according to the laws of Michigan, United States.

This contract may be changed only by written agreement between the Editor and the Client and constitutes the only agreement between the parties.

Editor Signature _____

Editor (Printed Name) _____

Date: _____

Client Signature _____

Client (Printed Name) _____

Date: _____