

Writer's Coffeehouse Tucson

How to choose and work with an editor "guide"

1. What kind of editing do you need?
 - a. Developmental
 - i. Big picture stuff. Plot, characters, world building, structure, pacing, whether it's "to market" ie does it likely meet reader expectations for genre/subgenre/subject matter
 - ii. Often the most expensive (Fiction runs \$0.03-0.04 per word; \$3,000-\$4,000 per 100,000 words according to The-EFA.org but you can often find good ones for cheaper. A good lower price is probably \$0.01 per word)
 - b. Line Editing
 - i. Chapter, paragraph, and sentence structure, flow, word choice, looking for clarity, accuracy, precision, and readability
 - ii. Similar to Developmental in cost as there is overlap with both developmental and copyediting.
 - c. Copyediting
 - i. The mechanics of writing - grammar, spelling, punctuation
 - ii. A little less at 2-3 cents per word. A good lower price would be about a half cent per word.
 - d. Proofreading
 - i. Looking just for obvious mistakes and typos (for example, doubled or missing words/punctuation and formatting problems)
 - ii. Cheapest at 1-2 cents per word, though I often see it at a tenth of that.
2. How to find an editor
 - a. Referrals from other authors, especially in your genre
 - b. Vetted freelance sites, such as Reedsy and Critique Match.
 - i. The editors there have to meet some minimum requirements in order to hang their sign but often run more expensive.
 - c. Social Media
 - i. If there are editors you follow whose advice you vibe with, reach out to see if they have availability. Online writing or reading groups sometimes have lists of editors (weekly "Author Services" post or a pinned post)
 - d. Unvetted Freelance Sites
 - i. The-EFA.org, Fiverr, Upwork, etc. Freelancers put up their shingle and you search them out. Sometimes you can list a job and take applications
3. What you can expect when you reach out to an editor
 - a. They should have a professional website or webform with further information (or have a full profile on a freelance site)

- b. They should reply promptly - typical business response time is considered within 3 business days unless they say something else on their website/form or if they have an “out of office” message
 - c. They should answer any questions you asked in your initial email, message, form
 - d. They may give you a quote based on word count and type of editing, or they may look at a sample before doing so
 - e. They should give you instructions on submitting a sample either on the initial form or in their reply email
 - i. What’s a sample? Usually 500-1000 words from a little later in the book (after chapter 3) that you send in for the editor to edit and show their skill. You’ll see if they know what they’re doing, if they communicate clearly and in a manner that works for you.
 - ii. This can grow to a long term relationship, so making sure they edit your type of work and do so in a manner that appeals to, resonates with, or that you can otherwise handle is important.
 - iii. Usually the sample edit is free, but some editors who’ve been burned in the past may charge a nominal fee that will be applied to your final project should you book with them.
 - iv. Some editors might be willing to negotiate for a longer sample. Say 1-2 chapters, and charge a relatively nominal fee that will be taken off the final fee or used as a deposit if you book with them. Example: \$50 for a one pass edit on 2 chapters. You book with them and they use that as your deposit toward your \$1,000 final fee.
 - v. They should give you a timeframe as to when they will return the sample.
 - f. If you have any questions, they should be willing to answer or clarify
 - g. If you have accommodations for disability or language usage (if English isn’t your first language), it might help the editor if you share them.
4. What to expect when you start working with an editor
- a. An agreement, contract, memo, etc spelling out in writing responsibilities for both parties, the cost structure, payment plans, deadlines, tasks, and basic information about your manuscript (working title, approximate word count, brief description in case title changes that includes genre/subgenre)
 - b. A reminder or two as you get closer to the due date
 - c. A good editor should phrase their critiques in a way that is educational and helpful, not hurtful. They should also tell you what you’re doing right. They should use plain language whenever possible and define editorial terms. For example, a comment might read: You need commas around this appositive (that’s the extra information defining who “Bob” is). Bob, my boss, laughed at my mistake.
 - d. If you want updates, please let the editor know. A quick weekly email with the percent complete can be very helpful to an author who needs to plan their time. The overall expected time frame should be stated in the initial agreement, and any changes should be communicated clearly and quickly.

- e. This is your work, so all decisions are yours. However, you are paying an editor for their expertise, so take that into consideration before you die on your hills.
- f. Most editors have some sort of payment plan. If it's not obvious, ask. Many are willing to work one out on a case-by-case basis. The two I see most are:
 - i. a small deposit to hold the date, then half the remainder either before starting or after a first round, then the rest at the end
 - ii. half deposit, and half upon completion.

5. Red flags

- a. No professional website or other platform that is easy to navigate and get basic questions answered (how to contact the editor, general turnaround time, services offered, etc). If using a freelancer site, profile isn't complete and they don't respond to messages.
- b. Takes longer than stated for editor to get back to you without a legitimate reason
- c. Changes seem to be made without taking into account the full context of the sample (for example, you use British spelling and the editor just changes it to US spelling without seeing that every option is British spelling. A note making sure you want British spelling is appropriate, especially if it's only a few words)
- d. Changes seem to be made using only a grammar checker (for example, suggests too many semicolons for fiction)
- e. They say nothing nice about your sample
- f. They don't explain at least some of their reasoning.
- g. Yellow flag: Prices far outside the EFA windows