The Business of Storytelling

Creating a sustainable writer-editor career

Jennifer Lawler

Acknowledgments

Dedication

To Jessica, for being my greatest cheerleader and for always making sure we have groceries.

Note to Readers

This book contains references to a number of different vendors. With the exception of the Club Ed businesses (ClubEdFreelancers.com and ClubEdforWriters.com), which I own, I don't make money from these referrals and I don't necessarily endorse using the vendors mentioned. They are listed as resources to help get you started in your own research and decision-making process.

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Introduction:
Invitation to a Journey

If you've been in love with stories for a while, you've probably thought about making them the center of your working life. But if you're also a realist, you know how unlikely it is to make a living from the stories you tell. And since you like to eat (or so I assume), you may have set that dream aside.

But I want you to take that dream off the shelf. You *can* make a living from your knowledge of writing—it's just probably not in exactly the way you think.

I've been in love with stories from the first time I picked up a book and read the whole thing by myself. The book featured Pat, a cat who sat on a mat; in this case, the villain of the story was a tack.

I bet you've loved words for just about as long as I have and I bet you have a memory not a whole lot different from that one, when for one electrifying moment the world shifted and you knew what you wanted the rest of your life

to be about. Maybe you weren't five, maybe you were ten or twenty-two or fifty-seven, but you felt it. And you knew then, or at some point when it became clear that you would have to do something for a living, that what you wanted to do was to make a living with words. More than words: stories.

But I don't have to tell you that it's hard making a living as a writer, especially if you're more interested in creative work (such as fiction or memoir) than in writing blog content for a mattress company.

Don't get me wrong, I've done my share of writing, "One reason you may want to invest in a mattress topper is . . ." over the years but it's not what gets me out of bed every morning. If someone hadn't been paying me, I wouldn't have done it, no different from the clerk at the DMV who hands over your license plate.

What gets me out of bed is Lucinda, who lives in a world where gods walk along with humans; and Lois, a reluctant wizard who lives on the West Coast; and Bernie, who insists that his name is Bernard, but I never pay any attention to that . . . and a lot of others.

That's the kind of writing I'm talking about, and that you're probably thinking about, too, when you dream of making a living with words and stories. Maybe your stories are

about your childhood, or about the time you scaled Mt Everest; maybe you write noir novels about detectives and gun molls, or sweet romances set in small towns, or thrillers that span the globe. But unless your name is Lee Child or Nora Roberts, those stories probably aren't contributing much to your bottom line.

I've had my novels published by traditional publishers—some major (Simon & Schuster), some smaller (Avalon)—and I've self-published a handful. That's not what pays the bills (though I certainly wouldn't mind if it did).

Writer + Editor

What does pay the bills? The editing that I learned how to do precisely because I'm a writer. I've freelanced as an editor for traditional big publishers (the aforementioned Simon & Schuster), for smaller publishers (Collectors Press, RIP), for book packagers (Girl Friday Productions), and for hybrid publishers (Greenleaf Publishing Group). I also do a lot of editing for indie authors (these are authors who are either self-publishing or want editorial help before they attempt to land an agent and a traditional publishing contract).

A few years ago, I started a small company, Club Ed (ClubEdFreelancers.com) that teaches

newer editors how to do their work.

This combination of writing and editing has sustained me and my family for more than twenty years and has allowed me to pursue creative work that I wouldn't otherwise have had the time or mental space to pursue. And: learning how to be a good editor has taught me how to be a better writer.

Though I'll touch on the subject since it's important to many readers, this isn't a book about how to sell more books or get a traditional publishing contract. What this book is about is exploring what it means to have a writing-editing career that will pay the bills while allowing you the time and space to write the work of your heart.

I want you to think about your writing a little differently. I don't want you to look at your royalty statement or your Amazon direct deposit and say, "I made $65 last month from my writing, why do I bother?" I don't want your most recent rejection letter to discourage you. I want you to expand your thinking and put those skills and those stories to an additional use. I want you to use them to become a writer-editor.

Over the course of my freelance career, I've always combined my writing skills with editing skills. And being a combination—a

writer-editor rather than just a writer or just an editor—has allowed me to earn the kind of income I need to support my disabled daughter (not to mention myself) while also giving me plenty of time to pursue my creative work.

My creative work isn't just a hobby. I'm not saying this in the way I say that editing supports my pottery collection or my proclivity for purchasing hot sauces of every kind. I'm saying that without my creative work, I wouldn't be an editor. I wouldn't get the kind of editorial clients I get and I wouldn't know what to do with them if I did.

I'm not alone. This isn't one of those situations where the sample size is one. In my work as an editing teacher, I have found that the majority of my hundreds of students (well over half) are also writer-editors, and they find that both sides of their work are equally important.

The problem, or one of the problems, is that it can be difficult to juggle all of the work you need to do to successfully pursue a writing-editing career. That's because it takes a lot of effort to make any freelance career work. It's not just a matter of sending out a hundred resumes over the course of a month and landing a job. It's like sending out a hundred

resumes a month for the rest of your life.

It won't be easy, and anyone who says it is doesn't know what they're talking about. Or they've been ridiculously lucky. You can't count on luck, so I'm not going to assume you'll have much.

You *can* count on persistence, perseverance, and hard work, and those are the tools I'm going to assume you have or can develop.

What I'm going to show you is that it's possible to create a life where your paying work fits around your creative endeavors and not the other way around.

The Benefits of Freelancing
Because freelancing is challenging, people will instead often work a day job and try to do their writing on the side. That's great, if it works for you, but it never worked for me. There was never enough time. If I had a job that paid well enough to cover the bills, it was so demanding and the expectations so great that it didn't allow a lot of mental bandwidth for creative work.

If I had a job that allowed enough time and mental space for the creative work, it didn't pay enough to cover the bills. The stress of financial precarity made it hard to focus on anything creative.

If you're lucky enough that you have a great job that pays well and gives you a lot of time and space for the creative work, that's fantastic! I'm not saying freelancing is the only way, I'm just saying that for many of us it's the most realistic choice to accomplish what we want to accomplish.

I had another motive for pursuing freelance work, and that was my personal situation. My daughter was born with serious disabilities that meant I spent a lot of time in hospitals, clinics, and emergency rooms. I was divorced when she was three, and had to find a way to pay the rent without having to report to a particular place at a particular time. I had to leave the university teaching job I had worked so hard to achieve.

A huge number of people, particularly mothers, experience similar circumstances. Sometimes they feel they will have to sacrifice the creative work that gives their lives so much of its meaning in order to pay the bills while also being there for their child(ren). And it may not be children, it may be parents or a spouse, or it may be other challenges and obligations.

It doesn't have to be that way; we don't have to sacrifice everything in order to survive our lives. I've made more money as a freelancer than I ever did or could have as an employee. I

can also take every Monday off if that's what I want or need to do. The same is true of the thousands of freelancing colleagues I've met over the years.

Again, it's not easy, but most of us will agree that it's worth it. Of my freelancing colleagues who have decided to get staff jobs after all (the appeal of reliable, steady income is undeniable), almost all of them have returned to freelancing after their first, second, or third layoff. Staff employment made more sense when you could keep your job for more than nine months. That's not the reality of the workplace now.

Being able to run your own show, work flexible hours, have the time and space for your creative work, and make more money than you could at a staff job—those are the benefits of freelancing.

What's Next?

If you're still in, great! In the next few chapters, I'll give you the basics of what to expect from freelancing, and help you figure out how to achieve some kind of balance among the various demands. Then I'll provide an overview of the types of freelance writing and editing work you can do to pay the bills while you're also writing the stories that

motivate you to get out of bed in the morning.

Then I'll dig into exploring offering coaching, classes, and information products as a way to bulk up your bottom line, and, finally, give you some basic principles for getting started with your writing-editing business.

Bear in mind that what I discuss in this book is based on practices in the United States. For example, when I mention that *The Chicago Manual of Style* is the preferred style guide for most book publishers, I'm talking about US book publishers. For other types of English (UK, Canadian, Australian, etc.), other standards apply. Words are spelled differently and punctuation is not used in the same way. Be aware of this as you go forward.

Also note that what I discuss regarding story editing/developmental editing is very Western-centric, since that is the basis of my experience.

Still with me? Excellent. Let's start this journey!

Part One

What You Need to Know About Being a Writer-Editor

Chapter One: Succeeding as a Freelancer

I'm a direct person, so throughout this book, I'm going to give you the scoop without sugarcoating it. As I tried to make clear in the Introduction, starting and maintaining a freelance writing-editing career is hard. But in my opinion, and in my experience, trying to do creative work around a full-time staff job and other life obligations is harder. Giving up the creative work entirely is worse than that: it's soul-killing.

In general, according to a study conducted by Pew Research and reported in June 2023, self-employed individuals (a group that includes freelancers) report much higher levels of job satisfaction than staff employees and overall higher levels of life happiness. They're also able to work remotely in ways that most staff employees still can't.

For these reasons, I encourage you to explore freelancing as a viable way to give yourself the time and space to do your creative work without having to eat storebought

packages of ramen noodles (10 for $2!) for every meal.

Your determination may ebb and flow. Don't be alarmed. This is common and understandable. But don't give up.

The people I see who succeed as writer-editors have a clear plan, work the plan, and keep persevering despite setbacks. I'd love to see you do the same.

Is Freelancing the Right Choice?

What I want to stress is that the kind of freelancing I'm talking about means finding clients who will pay you well for your work. I'm not talking about part-time jobs that involve editing (though you can be a part-time freelancer) or contract work for one client that is basically a full-time job without the benefits, which is a scourge on humanity.

I'm talking about the kind of work that requires you to basically run your own business with multiple clients you work for. That's obviously not for everyone. And that's okay! Part of the reason you're reading this book is to figure out if this route is the right one for you. Maybe it is, maybe it isn't. But by the time you're through with the final chapter, you'll have a much clearer idea of how all of this works and whether you're ready to take

the wheel and drive your own bus.

Some people find the be-your-own-boss part hard. They need the structure of a staff job and the accountability of reporting to a boss. Others don't like the isolation of freelancing. No shame in that.

Below are some things to think about before giddy dreams of ocean-front cabanas short-circuit your common sense.

Freelancing Takes Work

I've mentioned that freelancing allows me the time and space to do my creative work and I've also mentioned that freelancing requires a lot of work. So I want to double-down on that point. Freelancing is not a good choice if what you're really looking for is a four-hour workweek or a passive income stream.

Freelancing is also fraught with uncertainty. At a staff job, you typically know what your duties are and you do them. In freelancing, much of the time you don't know what you're doing or what your next step should be or whether the work you're doing to build your business will ever be repaid. You have to be able to accept and sit with that uncertainty.

Freelancing Requires Marketable Skills

I said earlier that you can use your storytelling skills as an editor to help other writers create powerful stories. But you can't do this if you don't have solid storytelling skills and at least some basic understanding of editorial work.

You can learn these things, of course! But if you don't have them right now, your next step should be to build up your expertise before you start telling everyone you're an editor.

I don't want to mislead anyone: Editing is not an entry-level position. Neither is writing. You have to have knowledge and experience to succeed as a freelancer. You can get that knowledge and experience, but if you have literally none right now, you're not ready to strike out on your own just yet.

You Need to Be Self-Motivated

I talked about freedom and flexibility being key reasons why I'm a freelancer and have been for more than twenty years. But if you're too focused on the freedom and flexibility, you'll waste days, weeks, and months without actually building a business.

You have to be able to do the work, even on the days when you don't seem to be getting

much in the way of results.

I think of freelancing as the minor miracle that allows me to live a complicated life more easily and happily, but it's not automatic. The one trait successful freelancers share is the ability to work hard every day even if no one else notices.

Freelance Work Fluctuates

You've probably heard of the feast-or-famine cycle of freelancing, where you either have too much work or not enough. That's a natural part of freelancing and obviously it leads to income ups and downs. You can do a lot to protect yourself from these problems but if you're already living on the edge, paycheck-to-paycheck, you can't just chuck your job and expect freelancing to take up the slack right away.

It can take time—months—before you establish any kind of reliable income from your efforts. If you're sitting on a stockpile of savings, or you've hooked up with a life partner willing to take on more of the financial burden while you're getting established, you'll find it easier to start your own writing-editing business.

As a freelancer, you're on the hook for saving for your own retirement, paying for

your own health insurance, and so on. All of these things are doable (and freelancers have done them for decades) but you need to go into it with your eyes wide open.

The Muse Is Not Your Friend

If you're thinking about pursuing a writer-editor career, you can't do it only when you feel like it. If you're the type of writer who waits for inspiration to strike, you'll have to change that habit when you put on your "running a business" hat. The muse is not your friend; you can't wait for her to show up and expect to get anywhere.

If you've agreed to do freelance work for pay, you can't just shove it aside and miss all your deadlines because you have other things occupying your attention. This is especially hard if what's occupying your attention is your own creative work. (In Chapter Three, I'll talk about how to balance the paying work with the creative work.)

Being a freelance writer-editor is a good way to capitalize on your storytelling skills and to have the kind of flexibility many of us need in our working lives and can't get from a traditional staff job, but that doesn't mean you do what you want when you want to.

If you want to make professional wages

from your freelance work, you have to make some decisions. These are decisions, not sacrifices. A sacrifice is giving up your creative work because you can't fit it into your life alongside your day job and your family obligations.

A decision is agreeing (with yourself) to commit to doing the work even if you might sometimes have to get up earlier than usual or skip a happy hour with friends. Note that I am NOT saying freelancing means grinding it out and working sixteen-hour days and never seeing your friends or families and hustle hustle hustle. I am definitely not saying that—I mean, earlier I was going on about how I can take Mondays off if I want. And I can, if I plan for it.

What I *am* saying is that success will require some discipline, some priority-setting, and a lot of perseverance. That's the reality of trying to make a freelance career that allows you money, time, and flexibility.

To get to the point where your writing and editing skills are where they need to be in order to create this kind of life, you'll have to put in a fair amount of work. That may not appeal to you, and, again, there's nothing wrong with that!

I like drawing cartoons but I don't have any

interest in trying to get paid for doing it. I'm not at all willing to invest the time it would take to get really good at it. It's just a thing I do now and then when the desire strikes. I enjoy it, but if someone said I could never do it again, I'd just shrug and move on.

In contrast, if someone said I couldn't write stories anymore, I would be devastated. It's impossible to imagine a life without that.

I also want to make a note about the mental health challenges of freelancing. One thing I learned a long time ago is that if I don't set aside chunks of time each week for creative work, my mental health deteriorates. My depression takes root, everything seems dark and miserable, and I struggle to feel right. This is one reason I've always had to make time to do the creative work.

But freelancing can also be anxiety-provoking and if you struggle with keeping your worry in check it may not be the right solution for you. I don't mind the ups and downs of freelancing and in fact get energized by them; you never know what's around the corner! To me, that's exciting. To some people, that's terrifying. For me, the idea of doing the same thing every day for the next twenty years is what's terrifying.

Freelancing has allowed me to reinvent

myself multiple times over the years, sometimes with the writer side of the equation taking more precedence, sometimes with the editor side asserting itself. But always with words and stories being the central focus of my work. I've loved this about my career! But for some people it would be too much turmoil.

Understanding what freelancing entails helps you make the right choice based on your personal characteristics, wants, and needs.

Chapter Two: Why Choose a Writer-Editor Career?

I've been talking about the benefits (and challenges) of freelancing in general, and you might wonder why being a writer-editor in particular is the key to pursuing creative work while also earning enough money to keep yourself in tea and chocolate. After all, aren't there a lot of other jobs that can be done as a freelancer that would allow you to achieve the flexibility and income that would support a creative habit?

There certainly are! But choosing other types of freelance work has drawbacks.

Different Types of Freelancing Could Work . . .

I work with a talented freelance virtual assistant (VA); she has flexibility in her schedule and I assume she could work on a novel around her VA work if that was a goal she had. I've worked with several different website developers and designers over the years, all of whom have been freelancers. Last

year I worked with a freelance business development coach. I work with a designer who's a freelancer. One of my dearest friends is a freelance meditation coach. (I live in LA.)

And that's not including freelancers of all stripes that I've never had a reason to work with personally: coders, app programmers, accountants/bookkeepers, Pilates instructors, and a bunch more you can probably think of.

All of these freelancers I've worked with charge enough for their services that (I assume) they earn a sufficient income and have enough flexibility in their work to allow them the time and space to accomplish creative projects on the side as well, if that's what they want.

So if you have some skill that you could use as a freelancer, then I would definitely explore that.

. . . But That's Typically Less Effective

The reason I focus on becoming a writer-editor freelancer is because each side of the hyphen supports and reinforces the other side. That means that ultimately you do less work because your skills transfer from one field to another.

If I wanted to be, say, a freelance website designer because I have some experience with it and know I could make good money at that

while also working on my novel on the side, that's fine!

But . . . there's little about being a novelist that would make my website design business easier, and there's little about being a website designer that would make my writing any easier (or better or more efficient). And *that's* why I focus on a writer-editor freelance career for people who are interested in writing creatively.

I've mentioned before that I wouldn't be as good an editor as I am if I were not also a writer and that I wouldn't be as good of a writer if I were not also an editor.

That's true of all of us, and that's why I'm so focused on the business of storytelling, on being a writer-editor, not just a freelancer. Using what you already know about telling stories will help you earn enough money to sustain the storytelling side of your life; the storytelling side of your life will help you become a better editor and/or writer-for-hire, which means you'll get more clients and therefore can charge higher fees, which means you'll have that elbow room that's so important for creative work to flourish.

The Symbiotic Relationship

I wanted to expand on the importance of

that symbiotic relationship here, because it's a crucial part of why a writer-editor freelance career is so much more effective than a writer-designer freelance career or writer-programmer freelance career.

In the following chapters, I'm going to cover a lot of information about ways you can make money as a freelance writer-editor, but what I want you to envision (and create!) is a career where both sides of the hyphen mutually inform each other. That's when the magic happens.

The magic doesn't happen if both sides of the hyphen are too different. For example, if you write blog posts for a mattress company on the writer side and edit a trade publication for a heavy construction member organization on the editor side, you're not going to see much synergy between the two, and neither will contribute much to your ability to make your memoir more emotionally compelling or improve your skill in creating pulse-pounding action scenes in your thriller.

None of what you do in the above scenario will serve as a catalyst for growth of any of the other areas. You could get paid for writing the blog posts and editing the publication, and you might learn a little something about editing the trade publication from writing blog posts and

about writing blog posts from editing the trade publication, but there probably isn't going to be a lot of magic happening unless your heart's desire has always been to write content for a mattress company. You're just slogging on both sides of the hyphen.

I don't want that for you and you shouldn't want that for you.

Link Both Sides of the Hyphen

Instead, think about ways that both sides of the hyphen can connect. For example, if you've written a couple of narrative nonfiction books that have been published to modest acclaim, and in that process you've learned a lot about how to write narrative nonfiction books and you feel certain you could help other authors avoid making the same mistakes you made, and so save themselves six months of time, why then the editor side of the hyphen shouldn't be "technical reviewer for a CPA newsletter" it should be "editor of narrative nonfiction" or "coach for narrative nonfiction authors" or something along those lines.

That's not to say you can't be a technical reviewer, too, or that you can never have a mismatch between the two sides of the hyphen. I have sometimes had to do whatever it takes to pay the rent, and you probably will,

too, and there's no shame in that. Paying the rent is good. Constantly giving up on your dreams to pay the rent is not so good.

Generally speaking, I'm encouraging you to try to find ways to make the two sides of the hyphen intersect, overlap, and feed off each other, not least because it makes your work easier. Instead of having to learn and grow two (or more) separate skillsets, you have to learn and grow one basic skillset that is used from different angles.

And what you learn as a writer-editor may need to grow and change from time to time but it will never become obsolete: good storytelling is good storytelling now, a hundred years ago, and a hundred years from now. One of the best ways to future-proof your career is to acquire the kinds of skills that will always matter to humans (and make no mistake: stories are at the heart of what it means to be human).

And because you'll be speaking from a higher degree of expertise, the intersection of writer + editor significantly improves the likelihood of your building a sustainable (and profitable) freelance career.

Beyond these considerations is the connection factor. If that moment when you finally figured out perspective in storytelling is an "Aha!" moment you can still feel today,

then sharing your pleasure and excitement with others is natural and, just as naturally, they will connect with you: "Let me tell you about how I finally figured out perspective, which I know is challenging for a lot of us. A couple of years ago, I was a champion head-hopper (that is, shifting from one viewpoint character's perspective to another's willy-nilly), and we all know how much that gets criticized. But for the life of me I couldn't fix it. . ." is far more engaging than "In this paper, I will elucidate three effective methodologies for identifying perspective problems in works of fiction. . . ."

Someone will pay you for the knowledge and skill you attain on the writer side of the hyphen. Don't just tuck it away and use it for yourself! Apply it to the editor side of the hyphen.

That's why I think any creative writer should consider pursuing a writer-editor career, not just any type of freelance career.

Chapter Three: Balancing Both Sides of the Hyphen

As with any job you take to pay the rent, if you're not careful, the paid part of your writer-editor career can often take over, leaving you with little time to do the creative work that matters most to you. And that's despite the fact that you're freelancing specifically to give yourself time to do the creative work!

Throw in the demands of raising a family and/or taking care of others and/or being a contributing member of your community . . . and it can be a lot.

Integrate the Sides

This is one reason why I've been talking so much about making sure both sides of the equation feed off each other. If your paid work is completely different from your creative work, there's no chance for you to be more efficient and for each side to grow the other side. It's a constant effort of running from one side to the other without any cross-pollination to make your job easier.

I mean this even in the very simplest terms. A while back, I purchased a package of ISBNs from Bowker.com. These are unique identifiers required for books that are sold at any retailer, including ebooks sold online at Amazon or BN.com.

Bowker is the only organization that issues ISBNs. Individually purchased, ISBNs run $125 each, but in larger batches the cost goes down considerably: you can get 100 for $575, or less than six dollars each rather than the $125 you'd otherwise spend.

So, I purchased that batch of ISBNs for use by my self-publishing imprint, Lawler & Daughter Publishing, which is mostly what I use to self-publish some of my novels.

But I also use ISBNs from that batch to publish Club Ed books (including this one). Since I write books on both sides of the hyphen, it means I can buy the Costco equivalent of bulk ISBNs and both sides of the hyphen benefit. It would not have been as practical for me to purchase so many if I hadn't known I would be publishing both fiction and nonfiction titles with them.

I use the same laptop to write my novels as I use to write Club Ed books and most Club Ed content. I use the same programs and the same printer. The software that powers my personal

blog at JenniferLawler.com is the same software I use to power the blog at Club Ed.

And similarly going through the self-publishing process for my own books has helped me unsnarl problems my authors and students have. This makes me more valuable as an editor and a teacher.

But this is also about larger issues: it took me a long time to see how to spot head-hopping in my own writing and I had to focus very, very hard for many long months to see it, but now that I can, it's super-simple for me to spot it in someone else's writing. I can show not just where the head-hops are happening but how they can be addressed, because I've had to figure this out in my own work. My writing benefits from this knowledge and so does my editing.

Another editor might struggle to identify head-hopping or not have a clear idea of how to fix it or might not even notice it at all.

So now not only am I a better editor, I'm also faster. This means I can get more done in the time I allot to editing, so I can take on more projects, or give myself more time for other work that matters to me.

Intentionally integrating what you do on both sides of the hyphen helps you create the balance you need to be able to do the creative

work while also showing up for the paying work.

Making Choices

A great deal of ink has been spilled about productivity and how to cram more into your day, and some of this is helpful. I mean, it's better to focus on writing the next chapter of your novel instead of scrolling endlessly through Facebook, but basically it all boils down to making choices.

Years ago, freshly divorced and trying to make a living as a freelance writer-editor, I found myself overwhelmed by the demands of my new life. My daughter, who has multiple disabilities, was then three years old and unable to be in childcare—none of the programs would take her. An erratic babysitter I couldn't often afford was all I had when I needed a few hours' break. All I ever did, it seemed, was take care of my daughter all day, then work all night, then start the cycle over again the next morning.

I didn't have many resources—if I'd had resources I wouldn't have been so stressed! So I wasn't sure what I was going to do to change things.

Then I remembered a quote from a famous writer who once said that when she was a

single mother raising her daughters and feeling overwhelmed, she sat down and made a list of all the things she had to do, from paying the phone bill to raising her daughters to be happy, courageous adults. Then she winnowed that list down to the three most important things in her life and that's what she spent her time doing. The rest could wait.

The Three Most Important Things

So I followed suit. I made a list of the three most important things in my life. I came up with:

- my friends/family
- my writing/editing
- my personal emotional/spiritual well-being

Within each category, I devised a list of what was worth doing and what wasn't. So for example under "family/friends," spending time with my daughter was worth doing; spending time with the annoying friend who always made me feel bad was not.

For "writing/editing," work that paid well and was mostly trouble-free was worth doing. Work that touched my soul was worth doing. Work that didn't pay well and didn't touch my

soul wasn't worth doing.

Within the "personal emotional/spiritual well-being" category, learning Taoist concepts and meditating was important; attending time-intensive martial arts tournaments . . . not so much.

As simple as that, my life was back on track. Every time I sat down to a task, it had to pass the "Three Most Important Things" test. If it wasn't one of the three most important things, then it didn't get done. I just crossed it off. The friends who weren't really friends faded away. The uninteresting, poorly paying work found other homes. Unrewarding volunteer work got tossed.

I started being picky about how I spent my time. If I could maintain a relationship with a once-a-month phone call, then that's what I did, and I didn't kick myself for not being able to do more. When organizations I cared about asked for my help, I set clear limits: one fundraiser per year, for example. If that wasn't good enough, well, then they could just cross me off their list of volunteers entirely.

I realized that I was finally valuing myself and my time and learning to say no. Having the list backed up the "no." It gave me focus and purpose. It made me stronger. It also meant I got more sleep.

Living Your Own Agenda

It's still easy for me to fall into the old patterns. But now I remember to look at what I'm doing and if it isn't on the "Three Most Important Things" list, then I reconsider. I knew I was finally winning my battle against living other people's agendas when I started answering requests for my time and energy with, "I'm sorry, that's not a priority for me right now. Best wishes, though!"

I remember very clearly that one time I said it, I hung up the phone and realized my daughter had been listening to the whole conversation. And it felt good to know that I was teaching her what had taken me so long to learn: the only way to truly live the life you want is to do what matters to you and forget the rest.

Lately I have been thinking about things I'd like to do but need to give up. I want to learn how to play the guitar, but I'm also trying to build Club Ed, keep my editing clients happy, work on my own creative work, and support my daughter as she continues to grow into more independence.

You know what? I love music, and I would love to learn how to play the guitar, and I would love to be the kind of person who knows how to play the guitar. But learning

how to play the guitar is not a priority right now. It just can't be.

That's hard! But it is better to make decisions about what you're investing your time in than doing a bunch of things half-heartedly or without real intention.

Setting Boundaries

None of this can happen if you don't set boundaries — that is, if you don't make it clear that you are in charge of your own time and your own life. This doesn't always have to mean forcing a confrontation with your grandma to tell her she has to stop copying you on all the group texts. It may mean just opting out of the group every time, especially if you've already asked her to stop.

It may mean just turning off your phone when you go to bed so that you can get up at 5 a.m. to do some writing.

For me, it means not answering most emails that come in over the weekend, even if it would take me just a minute. I don't want students and clients to think that my weekends are available for conversation and consultation. They're not; they're for family time and creative work.

As it turns out, no one cares. They sent the email because they had a thought or a question

at the time and didn't want to forget it, not because they expected an immediate response.

If they *did* expect an immediate response on, say, a Sunday afternoon, it's just as well that I didn't reply so that they can know that I don't respond to emails on Sundays and I don't have to interrupt my day. They can go find someone else who will answer emails on Sundays.

I also use a time tracker ([Memtime](#)) that shows what I'm actually working on throughout the day, which helps me stay focused and gives me solid information about when my focus gets distracted. This helps me stay on track. Sometimes you have to set boundaries with yourself.

Work Within Your Schedule

To keep the paying job part of my writer-editor title from overwhelming my creative writing part, I do a daily writing practice (used to be every morning, now it's each afternoon). I also budget at least four hours each weekend. In addition, there are times throughout the year (notably August and December) where my paying work slows way down. During those times I work on creative projects.

We're often encouraged to have lofty goals—write and publish three books this year!—but I think small, practical goals are the

better way to get where we're trying to go. If you don't have room in your schedule right now to do what I do, then you're probably not going to be able to implement a daily writing practice, a weekend writing chunk, and two months a year devoted to creative work.

Start with half an hour a day. Defend that time with all you have. Don't schedule appointments or let your paying work slop over into it. Half an hour. Then build from there.

Balance Is Overrated

But I also want to say a few words about not worrying too much about balance. There is always more to do in one day, week, and lifetime than we can possibly cram into it. Choose your priorities wisely, notice when you're getting off track and make adjustments, but don't beat yourself up over not having the perfect balance.

Sometimes the kids will need more attention and sometimes the paying work will need more attention and sometimes you will desperately need to drop everything and write a story. And that's okay. You can feed one thing more of your time, energy, and resources when you need to. As long as you're not letting important things smash to the ground, they

can probably wait a bit.

But do check in with yourself every now and then. I used to do this quarterly but a colleague who does it monthly got me started on doing it more often. At the end of every month, I look back on what happened and how I felt about it and I make whatever adjustments are needed for the new month. This approach helps ensure that I'm not neglecting things that matter to me.

I've tried to be realistic about the demands of a writer-editor career, but I hope I've also equally conveyed the benefits: I wouldn't have it any other way. I couldn't do it any other way.

And I know if this is what you want, then you can do it, too.

Part Two

Overview of the Writing Side

Chapter Four: Traditional Publishing

The focus of this book is on making a life where you have time for creative work for which you may not receive much (or any) pay by establishing a freelance career that pays enough to allow you that time and space to pursue your creative work.

I'm going to leave it up to you to decide what creative work matters to you (writing your memoir, writing a novel, writing both, writing poetry, writing plays—whatever it is). Instead, I'm going to explore various options for the "freelance career that pays enough to allow you that time and space to pursue your creative work."

First, I want to focus on the "writer" side of the writer-editor hyphen, looking at ways to earn money as a freelance writer, some of which are likelier than others.

In general, unless you're going to work as a content writer (that is, writing blog posts and similar types of material for corporations) or have the chops to do well as a writer of service

pieces (how-to and self-help) or features (trend pieces, human interest, profiles), selling to outlets like Slate or Fortune, it's the editor side of the hyphen where you're likely to make the most money as a freelancer. I'll get to that in the next part of the book.

If you're someone who is dedicated to your creative work, you're probably not going to be all that excited about writing content for corporations. I recognize that. Nonetheless, I'm going to discuss all of these possibilities to give you an idea of the options.

Traditional Book Publishing

Traditional publishing, that is, being paid by a publisher to publish your book, is the most challenging of the options for making money as a writer because the competition is fierce and the opportunities are minimal. That doesn't mean you shouldn't give it a try if it's important to you; it's just that it's a long shot for generating much in the way of money.

But most writers dream of this so I'm going to cover basic information to help you understand how it works.

What's an Author?

Before I get too far along in talking about traditional book publishing, I want to talk

about different types of authorship. What an author is seems obvious, right? It's a person, generally speaking, who has written a book. But sometimes, as in the case of a celebrity or expert author, the person whose name is on the book didn't actually write it. Someone gave them a hand.

People interested in writing books have several opportunities:

1. They can be a book author, writing their own books under their own name (or, if writing fiction, a pen name if they want). For fiction, the author must have a solid mastery of craft. For nonfiction, it is helpful for the author to be a recognized expert in their subject area, or at least to have covered the subject extensively as a journalist. Some nonfiction writers, like Malcolm Gladwell, are successful even though they're not experts in their own right. These writers do in-depth research on topics of interest to readers and present the information in a compelling and accessible way.

2. Authors can be subject-matter experts, using coauthors and ghosts to help them write nonfiction books in their area of expertise.

3. Authors can be coauthors or ghosts, doing the actual writing based on information obtained from the expert who will be credited with the book. (More on coauthoring/ghosting is in Chapter Nine since it can be a lucrative part of a freelance writer-editor career.)
4. Authors can be celebrity authors. First they have to become famous in another field of endeavor. Then they decide to write books. Most choose one of the other three options.

Most of us would probably like to be in the first group—writing our own books—but this is of course the group that is the most difficult to break into.

Regarding the second group, if you're an expert who would need a coauthor in order to write a book, you're probably not reading *this* book, so I'm not going to spend any further time discussing it.

The third group, ghosts and coauthors, has the potential to be an income-generator (and a rewarding career path to pursue) and I'll talk about that more later in the book.

If you're a celebrity and therefore a member of the fourth group, you're on your own.

I'm going to dig into traditional publishing

from a traditional author (first group) perspective first.

Words to Know

Traditional publishing is difficult to discuss without reference to a lot of industry-specific terms and concepts (jargon!) Here are some of the important terms to know.

Acquisitions Editors

Acquisitions editors represent their publishing company and are the ones who actually offer the contract for a book.

Advance

Money a publishing company pays an author before their book is published. In general, the acquisitions editor plans to pay an advance equal to the amount of royalties—the author's share of profits— that the editor believes the book will earn in six months (in some cases, one year). Since figuring out how many copies a certain title will sell requires a bit of guesswork, and agents push editors for larger advances, often a book doesn't sell enough copies to *earn out* the advance. That is, an author may receive an advance but then never see additional royalties.

Traditionally, half the advance is paid on

signing the contract and half on acceptance of the final manuscript, but these days many publishers break the advance into thirds: one-third on signing the contract, one-third on acceptance of the manuscript, and one-third on publication.

Advances vary widely, depending on the publisher, the book, and the author. They can range from zero to well into the six figures. Recently, advances have been declining because of the poor economy and slow book sales.

Note: Some self-publishing sites claim that the author has to pay back the advance to a traditional publishing company if their book doesn't sell well enough to earn out. This is untrue. The only time an author has to pay back the advance is if they fail to meet contractual obligations, such as not delivering the book by deadline. Even then, most editors will work with the author to establish a new deadline. (Note that self-publishing companies do not offer advances.)

Literary Agents

Literary agents work as salespeople on behalf of writers. They sell the author's book to a publishing company and earn a commission from the advance and royalties (the standard

commission is fifteen percent). They protect an author's rights and try to ensure that the author gets favorable contract terms. Generally, they don't edit an author's work, although some will help an author polish their work before *shopping* it (sending it out to editors).

Publisher

This term is used loosely to refer to both the person who has the title of publisher and to the publishing company as a whole. The person who is the publisher is basically the boss. They are mostly involved in the financial end of the operation—making sure sales are good and revenue is flowing. They usually have the final say on editorial decisions, but they don't generally acquire books.

Royalty

The amount the author receives per book sold, traditionally a percentage of the cover price of the book but now commonly a percentage of the net price of the book (what the publisher sells the book to a retailer for).

Royalties tend to be graduated, with higher percentages for hard cover (perhaps ten percent) and the lowest percentages for mass market books (five percent). Mass market

books are the 5x7 paperback books you find at Walmart, the grocery store, and the bookstore. Trade paperbacks are of varying sizes; the royalty rate for these is usually somewhere between hard cover and mass market.

Ebook royalties run higher, usually somewhere in the range of twenty-five to fifty percent of the cover price.

As mentioned, royalties can also be paid on net earnings rather than cover price, and it makes a big difference in how much money a royalty rate will actually generate for the author.

Deeper Look at Traditional Publishing

Many writers dream of getting a book deal from a traditional publisher, where they'll be paid for their novel and see it on shelves in the bookstore. I started my career this way, and it was definitely a lot of fun! But it wasn't terribly lucrative. For most writers, it isn't. In fact, most writers won't be able to land a traditional book publishing deal at all, which puts traditional publishing on the "less likely" end of the scale.

Traditional publishing includes all royalty-paying publishers. They pay you for the privilege of publishing your book, they do the editing, cover design, printing, shipment/distribution, and (some) marketing.

Typically to get a publishing contract requires that you find a literary agent, as most major publishers don't accept manuscripts from authors without one.

Overview of the Process

For *fiction*, you need to have written the full manuscript (unless you've been multi-published by traditional publishers). You'll need to write a synopsis of the work (basically, a two- or-three page summary of who's who, what happens, and why). And you'll need to write a query letter describing the work (also called a pitch letter).

You send the query letter and perhaps the synopsis and a few pages of the manuscript itself to agents (depending on each agent's specific guidelines, which can be found on their websites). If the agent is interested, they will ask for the full manuscript (or some part of it).

If you're writing *nonfiction*, you must write a book proposal (even if you've already written the whole book). That's unless the nonfiction is memoir or a similar type of creative nonfiction, which is treated like fiction and the full manuscript is generally written ahead of time.

A book proposal is a type of sales document

that describes the intended content of the book, the author's credentials for writing it, an analysis of competing titles, the author's intended marketing and promotional efforts, and a sample chapter.

Then you pitch the book idea to agents using a query letter and either including the proposal or waiting to be asked for it, depending on the agent's guidelines. (This information can easily be found on agency websites.)

If all goes well (in either fiction or nonfiction), an agent will agree to represent you and will sell the book/proposal to an acquisitions editor at a publishing company and sometime thereafter, the publisher will publish the book, and then, one hopes, readers will buy it and love it. Ka-ching!

Some publishers (very few, mostly small) allow authors to query them directly. In this case, the process is still the same, it just cuts out the get-an-agent process: you pitch the project to the publishing company as directed in the writers' guidelines (these are guidelines produced by the publishing company for writers). If interested, the acquisitions editor will ask to see the proposal (for nonfiction) or the synopsis and complete manuscript (for fiction).

Relatively few people are actually offered publishing contracts, so it's best if you have a realistic idea of the chances. They are very low. Perhaps one or two percent of all submissions are eventually published the traditional way (and that may be overstating it considerably).

You can improve your chances by writing an excellent book and developing a platform (a way to reach your audience) but this is no guarantee of success. (I discuss building an author platform later in this chapter as reaching your audience is important whether you're seeking traditional publication or are self-publishing.)

Editing takes place in several rounds, for both fiction and nonfiction: a developmental round (DE), in which any outstanding big-picture problems are addressed; a copyediting round (CE), in which sentence-level problems are dealt with and the manuscript is edited to adhere to the publisher's style guide; and a galley round, where the author reviews the page proofs (the actual laid-out book) for any egregious errors.

Most publishers have a final proofreading round before the book is published, but the author is not generally involved in that round.

Bigger publishers tend to sell more books, meaning you will typically earn more money if

Penguin Random House publishes your book than if Red Hen Press does. PRH can get your book into bookstores (where readers are more likely to discover it) and can afford marketing costs, such as paying for placement at the front of the bookstore.

But bigger publishers are much more selective in what they publish and a smaller press is more likely to take a risk on an unknown author with nothing much in the way of a platform (as long as the book is good!)

Four Ways Authors Find Agents

Where does an author find an agent? Especially a good one? Herewith, the four basic strategies, in no particular order:

- Through writers' conferences. These often have pitch sessions where authors can meet with various agents and pitch their manuscripts.
- Referrals from other writers. In other words, networking and schmoozing.
- The agent finds the author. Dream on, right? But this happens much more frequently than you might realize. (One of my agents found me!) By putting your work out in the world, it's possible to attract the attention of an agent looking

for a writer for a specific kind of book she knows editors need.
- Querying. The author sends pitch letters to agents cold. It works!

If you're trying to find an agent, your most important asset is perseverance. It's not unheard of for an author to send a hundred queries before getting a bite (if they get a bite at all).

Things to remember: if you send out fifty or one hundred queries at once, this doesn't allow for making changes to the pitch (or the project). Once you've pitched an agent, and the agent has said no or hasn't responded within a reasonable amount of time (not responding is how some agents say no), you can't query them on that same project again.

By sending a few letters at a time (say five or ten), you'll have the opportunity to tweak your pitch if you're not getting any bites. By the same token, if you're getting bites but no offers of representation, that means the proposal (for nonfiction) or the manuscript (for fiction) needs more work.

You can check out AbsoluteWrite.com for the scoop on agents on the Bewares, Recommendations and Background Check forum.

You can learn which agents are interested in which genres on AgentQuery.com.

Spending some time reading agents' blogs can give you a sense of whether they'd be a good match (and it will also help educate you about the publishing business).

Query Letter Basics for Fiction

The query letter always describes story action in the present tense ("Jeremiah asks his boss for the day off" *not* "Jeremiah asked his boss for the day off.") This is how literature is always discussed. The query consists of a description of the story, details about the manuscript itself, and a little bit about the author:

- What is the story about? What is the conflict? What are the stakes?
- Where does it fit in the market? What is the genre (romance, mystery, etc.) and word count? Does the query demonstrate that the author understands the genre?
- Who is the author? This includes publishing history and important prizes and awards.

That's a lot to do in 300 words or so. At the

same time, the query needs to get the attention of people who have fifty-seven other things to do this minute, so there's no time to waste on throat-clearing.

The opening paragraph of the query should include a hook—the reason why readers would want to read the book. When people ask, "What do you write about?" authors will sometimes answer with something like, "I write romances with smart, sarcastic heroines and unexpected heroes." But that's not a hook, it's just a description. A hook is along the lines of:

When investigator Jeremy James goes after the arsonist who burned down the old library, he doesn't expect to find his old girlfriend holding the match.

The story description shouldn't take more than a couple of sentences. In the story description, the agent/editor will need to know:

- Who is the main character (or characters)?
- Why should we care about them?
- What is the main conflict of the story?

And don't forget, the query needs to include the title of the novel, its length and genre, and

the fact that the full manuscript is complete. Many times writers try to pitch incomplete novels but as I mentioned before unless the author is an already established novelist, an agent or editor is going to need to see the complete manuscript to make a decision.

Finally, the query should close with pertinent information about the author—*pertinent* information. If you've written a novel about auto racing, your day job as an accountant doesn't matter. If you've written about auto racing and your day job is with NASCAR, that's something else.

Published books should be mentioned (even if they're not in the genre of the novel being pitched). Important prizes or special recognition for writing should also be mentioned. If you don't have much to say here, you can mention being a member of a writing organization or two, which shows that you're trying to be professional.

What the letter *shouldn't* say is

- "I've never been published."
- "I don't know what I'm doing, hahaha!"
- "This is my first feeble attempt to get published."

The letter should sound professional and

confident.

The letter should close with an offer to send the full manuscript for the agent or editor's review. Your contact information, including phone number and email address, should be easy to find on the letter itself.

Query Letter No-Nos

In the course of my career as an agent and later as an acquisitions editor, I encountered a number of common mistakes in query letters. Don't make these!

- Forgetting to give the title of the book. Authors often forget to mention the name of the book when they're querying.
- Failing to give their own name. When the author is querying via email (which is 99.9999% of the time), the query letter should include the author's actual name ("Sincerely, Jane Doe"). I often received emails from addresses like qrst@gmail.com with no further identifying information—and the writers would fail to include their names in the query. These often got a form rejection. You know why? Because dealing with an author shouldn't be hard. Who the author is should not be a secret. An

author who doesn't even put their name on a business letter struck me as clueless enough to need more handholding than I had time for.

- Misspellings, typos, grammar errors, and the like. One or two wouldn't result in an automatic rejection, but more would. Your query should reflect writing competence.

Five Approaches That Don't Work in a Query

More generally, there are some common approaches to writing a query letter that just won't work to capture a decision-maker's attention. These are:

1. Focusing on telling about the author and not about the book.
2. Describing the theme of the book ("it's about love and hate") and not the conflict and story ("Joan is trying to escape the law and Michael is trying to track her down").
3. Telling all the nitty-gritty details of who did what (save that for the synopsis).
4. Sounding defensive or attacking ("I know no one in the liberal media will

want to read my novel about religious faith, but . . . .")

5. Using vague generalizations instead of specific information ("Lots of people will be interested in reading this book, because lots of people like mysteries.")

Don't Do This!

You'd think after all my years in the biz, I'd know better. But five or six years ago, I finished writing a mystery and wanted to query it.

Here is my terrible, terrible query:

> Dear NAME:
>
> I recently completed an 80,000 word mystery, *Second Acts,* which I believe is right for YOUR COMPANY.
>
> I'm a professional writer with more than twenty-five nonfiction books published. My most popular book, *Dojo Wisdom* (Penguin Compass), won an outstanding book award from the American Society of Journalists and Authors. My first novel, *Then Will Come Night and Darkness*, was published by Xenos Books earlier this year. My articles and essays have

appeared in magazines such as *Family Circle, Cooking Light,* and *Oxygen.*

As per your guidelines, I've attached a brief synopsis and the first three chapters of *Second Acts.* I would be delighted to send the complete manuscript for your consideration.

Yours,
Jennifer Lawler

Oh, I cringe even to share that, but I feel the cause is worthy. You can see where I went wrong, can't you? Where is the information about the actual novel?

I did figure out where I went wrong, and I did sell the novel. But not to the person I sent that query to.

Sample Query Letter #1

Here's the query that did sell:

Dear NAME:

When former B-movie actress Maureen Haines's converted barn burns down, her first concern is that her husband Gary has been killed. When it turns out that he

wasn't hurt in the fire, she realizes that he has disappeared.

In her search to find out what happened to him, she uncovers evidence that he has been having an affair. Maureen is furious that Gary has betrayed her but her former lover and sometime friend Miller thinks there's more to the story than she's seeing.

As they piece together what might have caused Gary to leave, Maureen finds herself the target of mysterious threats.

At first she's afraid that it's a former fan who stalked her some years previously, but when Gary shows up with a wild story about enemies wanting to steal his scientific research, Maureen doesn't know what to think.

But she knows she's going to find out the truth—even if it kills her.

I'm a writer who has written several novels published by PUBLISHER. I've would be delighted to [yadda yadda].

Sample Query Letter #2

Here's another query that sold:

Dear NAME:

I recently completed a 53,000 word romance, *Love by Design,* which I believe is right for Avalon.

Tess Ferguson has a weakness: taking in strays. She's a seamstress who dreams of becoming a fabric designer—but she's also a single mother with more practical matters on her mind. When Tess's sister-slash-boss, Greta, an interior designer, is laid up after knee surgery, Tess must be her go-between with Michael Manning, the sweet, sexy owner of a carpentry business. Tess is attracted to Michael's calm, quiet strength, but she's convinced he's just one more stray destined to cause her trouble.

Michael is drawn to Tess, whom he finds warm, open and likable. But her curiosity and persistence in asking questions he doesn't want to answer threaten his hard-won peace. By burying himself in his

work, he can forget about the shocking death of his wife and unborn son—and the unhappy secret she left him with.

As per your guidelines, I've attached a brief synopsis and the first three chapters of *Love by Design*. I would be delighted to send the complete manuscript for your consideration.

Sincerely,

If you spotted that it would be better to start with the hook ("Tess Ferguson has a weakness...") and to include the manuscript details a bit later in the query, you would be right, but don't feel that a query has to follow a template exactly.

Just be sure that you've included all the relevant information, and that the story description will engage the agent's or editor's attention (easier said than done, of course!)

Query Letter Basics for Nonfiction

As I mentioned above, nonfiction books are sold by proposal (writing a book proposal is a complex endeavor outside the scope of this book, but I highly recommend Michael Larsen's *How to Write a Book Proposal*, which

includes examples of proposals that have sold).

Once you've gotten that prepped, you still need a query letter to convince the agent/editor to read the proposal. A nonfiction query letter consists of a description of the proposed work, details about the manuscript itself, and a little bit about the author:

- What is the book (going to be) about?
- Where does it fit in the market? What is the genre and (expected) word count? Does the query demonstrate that the author understands their audience?
- Who is the author? This includes platform, publishing history, important prizes and awards.

As with fiction queries, that's a lot to do in 300 words or so.

The opening paragraph of the query should describe the reader's problem and how the book solves it:

> Busy moms need simple, nutritious meals that don't cost the earth. My proposed book, *Simple, Cheap, Nutritious Meals*, is meant for them.

Notice how the phrase "my proposed book" cues the reader that you haven't written the full manuscript. That's exactly right. Agents and acquisitions editors don't want finished nonfiction manuscripts (with the exception of memoir and narrative nonfiction, which are acquired more like fiction than nonfiction). They want proposed books that they can help shape to meet market or business needs.

If you can make the first sentence or two into a hook, so much the better. A query letter that starts with "I'm writing a book on ways to save money" isn't going to grab anyone's attention. "Is credit card debt keeping you up all night?" may sound like an infomercial, but it's much more likely to catch an editor's or agent's attention. Even better if you can be a bit more original: "If you got a good night's sleep last night, you're probably not among the 70% of Americans with serious credit card debt."

Next, the query should have a few sentences describing the book. Here, the focus should be on the takeaway value of the content, so rather than just saying something like, "My proposed book is about the United States' Civil War" you need to focus on the value for the reader: "The reader will understand how today's extreme bipartisanship has its roots in the United States' Civil War." The reader may or may not

be left with any actionable steps to take but they will at least understand the relevance of the book to their lives.

And don't forget, the query needs to include the title of the book, its (proposed) length and genre, and the fact that a proposal is available. Don't pitch agents before you have a book proposal ready to go. Authors often want to test the waters before they invest the time in writing the book proposal, but good book proposals take time, and if an agent bites on the query, the author will end up rushing to complete the proposal (or risk losing the agent's interest). Additionally, writing the proposal will help you sharpen your idea and avoid creating an overly general query letter.

Next, the query should include pertinent information about yourself and your platform. Platform—the author's ability to spread the word about their work/deliver an audience—is hugely important in nonfiction book publishing (much more so than in fiction) and you'll probably need to work on this before you try to pitch your book idea. (Another possibility is for you to connect with an already established expert who is not a writer as a ghostwriter or coauthor, an option I discuss later in this book.)

The letter should close with an offer to send

the proposal for the agent's (or acquisition editor's) review. Your contact information, including phone number and email address, should be easy to find on the letter itself.

Query Letter No-Nos

As I mentioned in the section on fiction query letters, in the course of my career as an agent and later as an acquisitions editor, I encountered a number of common mistakes in query letters. My same recommendations stand for nonfiction:

- Don't forget to give the title of your book and your name and contact information
- Watch out for misspellings, typos, grammar errors, etc.
- Eliminate self-dismissive information ("this is my sorry attempt to interest an agent in my work")
- Don't focus only on telling about your credentials, talk about the content of the book; in nonfiction both author credentials and content information are equally important
- But don't get bogged down in the nitty-gritty details of illustrations, appendixes, interview subjects, what

each chapter contains—save that for the proposal

- Delete defensive or attacking material ("I doubt you're intelligent enough to understand the awesomeness of my genius")
- Use specific information instead of vague generalizations (avoid: "Lots of people will be interested in reading this book, because lots of people like to learn new skills")

Sample Query Letter #1

Here's an example of a query letter that sold a business book:

Dear Agent,

I'm a full-time writer and editor. That means I'm also a full-time small business owner. If I don't run my freelance career as if it were a business, I'll lose money, customers and, eventually, my job. Yet, like many creative people, I never bothered to listen during accounting class. When a helpful friend asked me what my business plan was, I answered, "I plan to make a lot of money with my

business."

Frankly, the idea of keeping books and tax records terrified me; I need a calculator to figure out 10% off at the grocery store. But with the help of some very patient friends and family, I learned how to run my business like a business. I learned what projects were best bets for my bottom line, and which weren't worth the time I spent on them. I learned to value my time so I could bill more realistically, and I learned how to market my "product" effectively.

Although I consulted small business books, most of them weren't for me. Creative people are in service professions, even though they may make a product. They almost always own single proprietorships, so the question of business organization is moot. They don't have helpful assistants to manage (usually), so they don't need to know how. And they don't sell their businesses in order to retire; they are their businesses.

For these reasons, I am writing a

guide called *TITLE*, targeted at writers, artists, photographers, and others in similar professions. I would expect it to run about 80,000 words. Would you be interested in seeing a proposal for this book?

Sincerely,

Though this query letter led to a request for the proposal and the book was eventually published, if I were writing this query today, I would include more information about my platform. While the query letter piqued interest without that information, it would have been stronger if it had been included.

Sample Query Letter #2

Here's an example of a query letter for a self-help book that sold:

A few years ago, at a cocktail party hosted by an old friend, I mentioned that I'd just earned my blue belt in Tae Kwon Do. Among the party-goers my choice of hobby was considered an odd one, to say the least. "What is that?" someone asked, "the art of Japanese cooking?"

"No," my old friend replied, "that's Jennifer's new religion."

While it wasn't exactly true that I had abandoned my former faith for the somewhat more arcane rites of Tae Kwon Do, my old friend had managed to sum up the meaning of my martial arts experience in one short sentence. Faith, hope, love and charity—that's what I learned, four evenings a week at 5:40 p.m., Saturdays at 10:00 a.m. Saturday class, in which we practiced board-breaking, was indeed my Sabbath, inviolate and sacred.

When I joined the neighborhood martial arts school, I was doing just fine. When you are as smart as I am, you are always fine. When you are as talented as I am, you are always fine. When you are as smart and talented as I am, it is perhaps inevitable that you become arrogant. I need hardly add that when you have all that going for you, you are also always alone.

Which was fine with me.

I don't know if it was the first class or the second that made me

cry. I learned some terrible and unwelcome truths about myself. I learned that I really was afraid, a lot, all the time. Afraid, weak, unkind. I also learned how then to be brave. And strong. And kind.

My instructors taught me the five tenets of Tae Kwon Do, and how to use them--courtesy, integrity, perseverance, self-control and indomitable spirit. It wasn't always easy to perform courtesy to people who weren't half as smart as I was, but I learned how. I also learned I wasn't half as smart as I'd thought. Along the way, I became happier, healthier, friendlier. I even acquired a husband and subsequently a family. Each day, when I bow to the flags, showing respect, I am deeply grateful for the second chance I got to become a better person.

I am writing a book about using martial arts philosophy in everyday life, not just for martial artists but for all those people who are just like me, just the way I was,

all those people who are doing just fine. . . .

Would you be interested in seeing a proposal for *TITLE*? Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

This query relies heavily on the ability to tell a story about personal experience. That personal connection to the subject matter makes for a compelling query and ultimately led to a sale. However, as with the other query, this one could benefit from having more information about the author's platform. Especially now, traditional publishers are looking for that information right up front (which is why I'm stressing it so much in these comments!)

Writing the Synopsis

A synopsis is an overview of what happens in a novel, from beginning to end. Most agents are looking for brief synopses these days (a few pages, no more than about 1,000 or 1,500 words), though some want longer (perhaps ten or fifteen pages, or up to about 3,500 words). For most purposes, a shorter synopsis of a few pages is going to be the best way for you to keep a reader's attention without getting mired

in unnecessary detail.

Once you have the bones down, you can flesh out the synopsis with more detail, perhaps including information about subplots and secondary characters, to meet the needs of agents who are looking for longer takes. If a plot is complex, a longer synopsis may be needed to do justice to it.

Most authors dread the synopsis even more than they dread the query letter! Sometimes they just throw a plot summary together and cross their fingers because they don't really understand what they're trying to accomplish in the synopsis.

Remember that the synopsis is used to make publishing decisions. A synopsis that poorly represents the novel will garner immediate rejections: few agents or acquisitions editors would invest the time in reading the novel itself.

So it's important for it to be a true and useful reflection of what happens in the novel—a selling tool that will convince agents and editors that you understand the genre and know how to write a compelling story. The purpose of the synopsis is to entice the agent/editor into reading the entire manuscript.

Writing the synopsis is gut-check time. If

you don't have a strong central conflict, that will be apparent in the synopsis. If the characters' goals aren't clear and compelling, that will be apparent in the synopsis. If you're having trouble communicating any of these points, the problem may not be in the task of writing the synopsis, but in the manuscript itself. You may need to reflect on whether the manuscript is truly ready for submission.

One other note: A synopsis, like a query, is always written in the present tense (that's how we always talk about literature).

Synopsis Basics

Writers often get bogged down in the play-by-play details of what happens in the plot. But the synopsis isn't just about what happens, it's about the characters, what drives them, and *why* the plot happens.

So the synopsis must introduce the main characters—the protagonist(s), villain (if there is one), other characters who play important roles—and it must convey the central conflict of the story.

For example: Well-connected developers want to force Jodie off the ranch that's been in her family for five generations—and she doesn't want to go.

That's the central conflict.

An effective synopsis introduces the characters and the conflict very quickly.

Next, the main character's goal must be abundantly clear. It should be a positive goal — the main character(s) must want something. And main the character(s) should have both external and internal goals.

Jodie wants to save her ranch. That's her external goal, the thing she is taking action(s) to achieve. So, you can see how that might drive the plot.

But more important: What's her internal (emotional) goal? What makes saving the ranch important? Maybe it's the feeling that she's responsible for a legacy and she'll be a failure as a person and as a daughter if she loses the ranch. Maybe she swore to her grandpa she'd save the ranch and if she fails, she'll be breaking her vow to the one person who loves her. Maybe the ranch employs five hundred people, and the entire town is counting on her to save it and she can't let them down.

Another way to put this is to ask what the character's motivation is for whatever goal the character has. The motivation or internal goal is usually what helps connect readers to the character. Once we (readers) understand a character's why, we're more likely to root for

them to achieve the goal. A goal without a motivation ("I want to make a million dollars because I would like to have a million dollars") is not very interesting. A goal with a motivation ("I want to make a million dollars to pay for the experimental surgery that may save my child's life") is more interesting.

That's because something's at stake.

Once the main character's goal is established, the goals of other important characters need to be stated. This is especially true if those goals come in conflict with each other (as they should). Maybe the well-connected developer who wants Jodie's ranch is near bankruptcy himself and if only he can swing this deal, he can save his business and keep *his* five hundred employees employed. Again, describe the external goal as well as the internal goal (the emotional motivation for the external goal).

Next, the synopsis should include the key turning points in the plot. Not every novel follows a classic quest structure, but each should have points where the plot reaches emotional peaks and valleys. The synopsis needs to describe what these are, how the conflict creates these plot points, and how the characters' decisions and actions drive the plot.

This is the point where many writers get

mired in "And then this happened and then that happened." Instead, remember to show cause: "because *this* happened, *that* happened."

Throughout this section, characters' goals and motivations will probably change (as they should). Show this growth and change (without belaboring it).

Then, the synopsis needs to describe the darkest moment—when all is lost, the protagonist gives up, and all that effort seems to have been useless. This is that point in the book where the reader can't see how the characters can possibly achieve their goals.

Not every novel will have this so-called "black moment" but there should be a sense of the conflict reaching its peak. Many authors make the mistake of taking it too easy on their characters, and this is evident because the main character sets out to achieve a goal and then achieves it. Agents/editors will give that kind of story a quick "no, thanks."

Finally, the synopsis should describe the resolution/ending. Agents/editors need to know how you've handled the resolution. Don't be coy.

For a shorter synopsis of a few pages, packing all this in will be quite enough. For a longer synopsis, you can also hit the high

points of the subplots and other less-important conflicts that may be taking place and can introduce less important characters and describe their roles in the plot. In a longer synopsis, more time can be spent fleshing out motivations and actions.

Sample Synopsis #1

This is the synopsis for a mystery called *Second Acts* that sold to a small romance publisher. This is a short synopsis for a short novel. As you can see, the emphasis is on describing the characters, the conflict, and the main plot points—nothing fancy needed! (The query that sold this book is included above.)

When former B-movie actress **Maureen Haines**'s converted barn burns down, her first concern is that her husband **Gary** has been killed. When it turns out that he wasn't hurt in the fire, she realizes that he has disappeared. At first, she chalks it up to his unhappiness with her decision to file for divorce and assumes he'll return eventually. A brilliant scientist, he's sometimes unpredictable and her experience shows that patience

is the best solution to any problem involving him. The fire attracts more attention than she'd like, both from the media and a former lover, **Steven F. Miller III**.

When she finds evidence that Gary's having an affair, her anger overcomes her unconcern and she sets out to find him. Her friend and attorney, **Debra**, tries to reason with her but Maureen is furious that Gary has betrayed her—despite the fact that she's ready to divorce him. Miller, as she calls him, thinks there's more to the story than she's seeing and accompanies her to the most likely places where Gary would go.

Maureen's determination to find out what Gary is up to is in no small part owing to the fact that if she can prove he's having an affair; a clause in their prenuptial agreement will allow her to divorce him without having to pay alimony.

As Maureen pieces together what might have caused Gary to leave, she finds herself the target of

mysterious threats. At first she's afraid that it's a former fan who stalked her some years previously, helping her to her decision to retire from the movie business and to marry Gary.

But when Gary shows up with a wild story about enemies wanting to steal his scientific research, Maureen doesn't know what to think.

With Miller's help, she looks into the threats against her and against Gary and comes to the conclusion that Gary has set the whole thing up to add spice and drama to her life—Maureen being addicted to drama. By giving her an adventure, he's hoping she'll settle back down into their married life.

Disgusted with Gary's antics, Maureen returns home, fuming. There she learns that some of the pieces of the puzzle don't fit the scenario she's decided must be true and now she's rattled. Should she trust Gary and believe him? Or was she right in the first place that he's

having an affair and trying to cover it up with an elaborate farce? As she and Miller look deeper into the problem, they learn that the fan who previously stalked her has escaped prison and may be behind the strange threats.

Her uncertainty about her future becomes an immediate short-term problem when the fan shows up at her home, expressing his desire to be with her. At first she thinks the fan is responsible for the threats.

Then she realizes that Gary is manipulating the fan to do his dirty work for him. Gary has been having an affair—with Maureen's friend Debra—but doesn't want to lose the money that he would in a divorce if Maureen were able to prove it. Not wanting to do the dirty work himself, he arranged matters to make the fan do it for him.

In the end, Gary is declawed, and Maureen goes on to a second act with Miller.

Sample Synopsis #2

This is for a paranormal romance that sold to an ebook publisher, and is another short synopsis for a short novel.

When NYPD police detective **Morgan Reilly** discovers the lamp and frees the djinn, she thinks she's hallucinating. After all, she's just back on the job after a high-speed chase left her with a head injury, and it's not the first visual hallucination she's had since the auto accident.

But freeing the djinn brings **Mere**, an exiled merman, charging into her life. He and his sidekick, **Lynell**, an elf, failed in their duty to protect a dragon's hoard that was stolen centuries ago and all this time they have sought to get it back.

Because Morgan can see him and interact with him although other humans can't, Mere must enlist Morgan's help in finding the hoard before the human sorcerer into whose hands it has fallen can learn its secrets. But first he must

convince her that he's real.

Their task is made more difficult by the seelie court, which rules the fairy world, and which exiled Mere and Lynell for their failure years previously. The court tries to stop the trio from their investigations, for bringing Morgan into contact with the fairy world will bring danger to all of them. The unseelie court, peopled by warped fairies who despise humans, wants the hoard for themselves, for they know it contains a pandora's box: a demon trapped in a box of fairy magic that will unleash devastation on the human world if it is freed. According to prophecy, Morgan is the mortal woman who bears the key that will open the box.

Not only must Mere battle the seelie and the unseelie courts as Morgan tries to investigate the theft of the dragon's hoard to track down its present location, he must battle himself: he wants Morgan the way mermen want mortal women, and the mating is deadly

dangerous for everyone involved. Morgan, not aware of the danger, succumbs to his dark desire and their coupling, explosive and magic, reveals their existence and location to their enemies, forcing them to flee for their lives.

With Lynell's aid, Morgan's investigative skills and Mere's patient gathering of information, they learn the identity of the human sorcerer who has stolen the hoard. But the sorcerer has allied himself with the unseelie court and Mere and Morgan fall into the hands of their worst enemies.

To force Morgan to turn over the key, the sorcerer threatens Mere, who is rendered powerless to use his magic to stop them. Yet Morgan does not know what the key is. When the sorcerer is convinced that she speaks the truth, he realizes that Mere is the key—since Morgan "bore" him into the presence of the box, the requirements of the prophecy are met.

Morgan knows the sorcerer will

do anything to force Mere to open the box. Desperately, she tries to summon up a small bit of magic to call for help, but whatever skill she has isn't enough. Then she remembers that Mere's ancient nature is beyond magic. Yet asking him to unleash it threatens to destroy them both. Can she trust him enough to control the demands of his merish needs if she calls them forth?

If he loves her, he will. If she loves him, she will take the risk to free them from their enemies. For the first time in her life, she puts her trust in something she can't see or feel or touch, and awakens Mere's essence.

They triumph over the unseelie court, and rescue the box from the sorcerer. Mere and Lynell are forgiven and restored to their places in the fairy world. Morgan awakens to find herself back home. At first she thinks she imagined the entire episode but she knows that she loves Mere and that her love is real. She finds him where he stands

sentinel over the dragon's hoard and asks why he let her go. He tells her that he seduced her with fairy magic and had to leave her to allow her to have free choice.

She chooses Mere.

You may have noticed some things that could have been smoothed out, written more clearly, or better explained. That's excellent! That shows you're developing the kind of eye you need to apply to your own sales tools.

Query letters and synopses are the basic tools you'll need to pursue traditional publication. Next up: self-publishing.

Chapter Five: Self-Publishing Basics

I wanted to provide information about traditional publishing since this is something most writers aspire to, and it's something that you can attempt even as you do other things to earn money as a writer-editor.

But as I've said, most writers aren't going to land a publishing deal with a traditional publisher. Again, if this is a hope of yours, I encourage you to pursue it! Other options will wait or can be pursued at the same time.

If you decide to opt for self-publishing instead, I do urge you to get outside professional opinions on your work and to use their recommendations to strengthen your writing. Not only will this help you become a better writer, it will give you some insight into the editor side of the hyphen.

Often very good books don't find a home with a traditional publisher, and thus self-publishing is a reasonable option, but other times a book isn't picked up by a traditional publisher because it's not very well-written.

You need an objective set of eyes (not friends or family) to help you see the difference.

I've had my fiction traditionally published but I'm now choosing self-publishing for much of my work because I'm more interested in writing what I want to write and not what an agent or editor thinks might sell.

But going through the traditional publishing process (finding an agent, etc.) has been very helpful in making me a better writer and a better editor; I've seen the work of many editors and have had some excellent ones and some terrible ones!

In other words, try to be honest with yourself. Learn to write well before you take any of these paths.

Self-publishing means you're in control of everything, from editing to cover design to production. It also means you're in charge of everything, and that can seem daunting! You have to hire an editor, a cover designer, maybe a book formatter—it's a lot. And not everyone is going to be great at managing it all.

But there are a ton of resources out there for people interested in self-publishing. I recommend finding a trusted source or two and focusing on what their recommendations are.

Jane Friedman (JaneFriedman.com) is someone I would trust regarding any type of publishing; Joanna (J.F.) Penn (thecreativepenn.com) knows a great deal about self-publishing.

It's easy to get overwhelmed when trying to self-publish, but the basics are very straightforward. That said, and let me stress this again, before you push "publish" on your book, you'll want to make sure your book is well-written and that you have a marketing plan. I cover the basics of book marketing and promotion in Chapter Six.

The Self-Publishing Process

Once you've finalized your project and are ready for the next step, you need to consider which sales/publishing platform you're going to use to publish your book. Though you can publish through multiple channels, one way to keep it very simple is to simply publish your book on Amazon. This is where the vast majority of book sales take place.

Many people hate Amazon, and that's fair, but it's very simple to create a book on Amazon and sell it through Amazon and get some money now and then.

Whether you want to do an ebook or a print-on-demand book (or a hardcover, or all three),

you start with Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP). To set up an account there, you'll need to give your tax information and your bank information so that they can send you tax documents and direct deposit your royalties (your share of the earnings from your book). Though it's a pain to fill out the forms, that's it. You don't have to worry about fulfillment or collecting money or submitting sales tax to the state.

For ebooks, you'll need your book file (a Word document is fine) and a cover. The cover needs to be 1600 pixels by 2560 pixels. You can make one yourself at Canva.com or use one of the very many cover designers in the world. For a straightforward nonfiction book like the one you're holding right now, you just need something simple but professional. Someone on Fiverr can probably do this for $50 or so, and there are many cover designers who can do a more sophisticated and customized design for you (ask colleagues for names).

Then you take your Word document and you follow Amazon's handy-dandy formatting guide. Then you go over to KDP and upload everything. They will assign an ISBN (unique number to identify your book). Their system crunches your data. You'll have to approve an online proof, which is a layout of how your

book will look on an ereader.

Make sure you look through it carefully for formatting errors. Once you approve the proof, pretty soon you've got a link to your published book. (You can also set your publication date to a specific date in the future if you want.)

For print books, it's more complex. I'm referring to print-on-demand books here (which are printed when someone orders one, not ahead of time).

Your cover has to wrap around your whole book, so its dimensions depend on how big your book is, which depends on how many words and what trim size (how large a book) you choose. Two common trim sizes for nonfiction paperback books are 5.5x8.5 and 5x8. For fiction, 6x9, 5.25x8, and 5.5x8.5 are common.

Format your book according to the Amazon guide and layout your book in the Amazon template or if that crashes your computer (it does mine) use Word. (You can create a template by searching "create a book in Word" and following the guide). This takes time and patience as you want to avoid glitches like a chapter heading being misplaced.

Once the interior of your book is laid out like a book, use the cover calculator to find out the size your cover needs to be. Send that

information to your designer/use it yourself in Canva or whatever design program you're using for your cover.

When that's done, go to KDP and upload everything. It will take a while to crunch all the numbers. Then make sure you order a print proof! You want to ensure your cover looks right and that the interior is laid out correctly. This is a crucial last step.

Once you've done that, approve the proof (online, in the KPD setup page). Pretty soon you'll get a link to your published book (again, if you prefer to set your publication date out by a few weeks or months you certainly can—if you do, you'll get a preorder link that turns into a link to the sales page as soon as the book is available).

That's it. Congratulations!

Publishing on Other Platforms

You can only use Amazon's free ISBNs for selling on Amazon. If you want to sell your book elsewhere, such as BN.com, or Draft2Digital.com, you'll need to purchase an ISBN for it from Bowker.

Each version of a book (ebook, print, second edition) requires its own ISBN. As I mentioned earlier, they're expensive when purchased singly, so if you think you will do more than

one or two books or versions of your book, spring for the package of 100.

Draft2Digital has a tool that converts Word documents to ePub files (the ebook format most retailers use). Or you can use Google Documents to export an ePub version of your work (which is what you'll need to do if uploading to BN.com, since they don't have a handy conversion tool).

The process for all of these is similar: you need to provide tax and bank account information, upload a correctly formatted file and cover for your book, and review and approve a proof.

Hybrid Publishing

Hybrid publishing is a type of self-publishing that takes some of the work off your shoulders. Instead of finding and hiring an editor (or editors) and a cover designer yourself, and instead of doing all the formatting and production of the book yourself, the hybrid publisher does it for you. This comes at a cost (to you), of course.

Some of them also offer marketing packages to help promote your book. These packages, in particular, are unlikely to be worth your money because unless they can get your book in bookstores—which is unlikely—they're not

doing anything you couldn't do far cheaper yourself. You'll be doing most of the legwork anyway, because they'll be asking you for the names and contact information of people who might review the book and so on. Why not just go the step further yourself and ask those people to review your book?

Marketing fiction is especially difficult, and most freelance book publicists don't take it on because it's so hard. But as the author you're in a much better position to promote your book than an outsider is.

In general, I think it's a better use of your time and money to do it yourself, though if you really do have a lot more money than time, this may be a reasonable route to go. Just be especially wary of the marketing packages.

If you don't have time to do it all yourself, it might be wiser to hire a virtual assistant (VA) who can perform specific marketing tasks for you. This will likely save you money and you'll have better control over what is done and when.

While hybrid publishers and so-called vanity presses share a similar business model (the author pays the costs of production), hybrid publishers are different (to a degree) in that hybrid publishers don't use scare tactics or pretend they're doing things they're not doing.

They're selling book production services and they're upfront about that. They also don't publish all of the books that come through the door. They are selective (some more so than others) despite the fact that the author is paying for their services.

Vanity publishers accept any manuscript that lands in their inbox and they try to pretend things that aren't true (that they can make your book a bestseller, etc.).

Again, a virtual assistant can help you with specific tasks, such as formatting, uploading to Amazon, and so on, typically for less money than a publishing company can do it.

Overall, there isn't a huge amount of money to be obtained through book publishing (even traditional publishing), except for a few outliers. As a writer, you want to see your work in print and available to readers, and that's a perfectly legitimate reason to publish. Just don't get too attached to the idea that you'll make a mint doing it. You probably won't.

For that reason, it's probably better to manage the self-publishing process yourself instead of paying significantly more to get someone else to do it for you.

Chapter Six: Building Your Platform and Promoting Your Book(s)

Whether you're seeking traditional publication or self-publishing, building your platform is necessary if you want anyone to read your books. Your platform is basically the way you reach readers to let them know about your book. Having a solid platform is necessary if you're seeking traditional publication for a nonfiction book. It's less crucial for fiction but can make a difference. In either case, having one helps you sell books when that time comes.

Note that if you're the ghostwriter or nonexpert coauthor, you will not be expected to promote the book (and indeed would have difficulty doing so, especially if you've been asked not to disclose your association with the project, which ghosts often are). In those cases, the expert is expected to do the book promotion.

Defining Terms

Let me define a few terms before we get too far along. Your *platform* is your built-in access to an audience. If you have a lot of subscribers to your YouTube channel, that's a platform. If you have an extensive email list, that's a platform. If you run a podcast with a thousand listeners, that's a platform.

Marketing is typically what you do around the time your book is published in order to make readers aware that it exists. Some of these efforts need to be started six or nine or more months before the actual publication of your book (such as building a newsletter list), but some of them will occur just before your book is published (sharing a preorder link with a special offer), and others wait until after your book is published (giving a reading from your book—but this actually needs to be set up before publication date).

So, you might use your platform to market your book. Marketing can include paid strategies, such as running an ad; it can include social media engagement; it can include content marketing (writing blog posts and the like); and many other possibilities.

Promotion is basically a specific strategy you use in order to build that awareness about your book, but the terms "marketing" and

"promotion" are basically used interchangeably by most nonexperts. We sometimes refer to a specific promotion as "a promotion," like running a Facebook ad for two weeks ("I'm running a promotion this week"). In that case, the Facebook ad might be part of a larger marketing strategy of using ads to build awareness about your book.

The Numbers Game

For traditional publishing, the bigger the platform, the better. For self-publishing, the more targeted the audience, the better.

If you're trying to get a traditional publishing deal, a million subscribers to your YouTube channel is going to be a far more compelling argument for acquiring your book than ten thousand carefully curated subscribers. It doesn't matter if none of the million subscribers will actually buy your book. Publishing companies want to see numbers. It's ridiculous, but if you think about it, what other metrics can they use to guess how well your book will do in the market? (That is, metrics that wouldn't cost them money to implement.)

But when you're self-publishing, you want people to buy your book. It doesn't matter if you broke your back getting a million

subscribers on YouTube; if none of them buy your book, why did you bother? (Okay, maybe you can get some lucrative sponsorship deal, but we're just looking at your book sales here.)

It's much better as a self-publishing author to focus on finding readers who will buy your book. So, evaluate every marketing effort you consider, and every marketing effort you undertake, in light of this question: Will it attract the kind of readers who will buy your book?

All marketing takes either time or money (and most take some of both), so it's best to focus on marketing efforts that you'll be more inclined to do versus marketing efforts you "should" do but don't really want to.

Sandra Beckwith has great information on marketing for self-publishing authors on her website BuildBookBuzz.com. Spending an afternoon reading blog posts there is a good use of your time.

Nonfiction Platform Basics

Successful book authors often position themselves as experts; others as journalists who can go to the experts, get information, and present it in an appealing way.

Positioning yourself as an expert does not mean you have to have the same credentials

everyone else has. For example, many reporters talk to psychologists about work-life balance issues. Does that mean you have to have a PhD in psychology to be quoted on the subject? No. I've been quoted on this topic because I pitched myself as someone who can show how to follow the principles of martial arts to lead a balanced life. So, use your imagination and creativity. Take a step back and look at how you can most favorably present yourself and your life experience.

But remember that having the appropriate credentials to write a book is related to but distinct from the platform you need to establish to promote your book.

For example, back when I was writing about martial arts, my having a black belt was a credential that allowed me to claim subject-matter expertise. But it didn't help me promote my books.

However, for a while I had an ongoing time slot on an online radio show that I used to talk about concepts in my books. (I didn't just say "buy my book" but that was certainly my purpose in having the show.) In other words, the black belt was a credential and the radio show was part of my platform.

Platform Examples

Examples of building your platform before you get your publishing contract/publish your book:

- Being interviewed in print, online, and broadcast media as the expert in your subject matter. This could be blogs, podcasts, online magazines, and so on.
- Starting your own blog, newsletter, and/or social media accounts where you talk about your subject and get followers/subscribers.
- Giving talks, workshops, and seminars on your subject. These could be self-sponsored or you could work to be invited to teach at conferences or through organizations like an arts center or a professional association.
- Practicing your subject. Be a coach or consultant, or own your own organization related to your subject. For example, if you're writing a book about mutual funds, it helps if you're a working financial advisor. Some writers earn these credentials as they establish themselves in a niche.
- Joining organizations related to your subject matter and related to

writing/book publishing itself. You can stay on top of developments this way and connect with people who might be interested in your book.

- Starting and maintaining relationships with a lot of people, especially those in your subject area and in publishing. Get out there and network! You don't have to be a smarmy salesperson to do this. You just have to be genuine. It gets easier with experience.

All of these approaches get your name in front of people and help you become accustomed to seeking promotional opportunities for your work. You'll repeat these efforts once your book is published in order to get people to buy it.

Finding Your Audience

To find your audience, ask yourself what you have to say, then do some research into who wants to hear it. When I was writing a lot of nonfiction, I described my work along the lines of, "I show people how to use the principles of martial arts to live happier, more successful lives." From that statement flowed all of my marketing/promotional strategies.

In other words, much as I loved (and love)

Click 'n Clack, I didn't try to get a spot on the "Car Talk" radio show (or podcast). Listeners wouldn't want to hear about how they can improve their lives by using the principles of martial arts, unless that would also teach them how to change a muffler.

It's important to move beyond thinking about just your current book and figure out how to promote all aspects of your career. Interlocking pieces support each other: books and articles generate interest in coaching, consulting, classes (and vice versa).

Think about this as if you yourself were a "brand." It makes sense for Nike, which started off selling athletic shoes, to also sell athletic clothing and even, say, an athletic drink. But Nike-branded ice cream? That wouldn't fit. Use that same thinking in terms of your own career.

Getting the Interview

How do you get people to interview you as an expert? Networking is one way. Those writers' organizations you've joined are full of writers looking for stories (and people) to write about, not to mention they always need sources (experts) to interview.

You can also join a service that pairs journalists with experts. Many of these require

a fee for experts to join, but the investment can pay off if you're quoted in publications that help establish your expertise. Two of these services are Qwoted.com and HARO.com(for "help a reporter out"). I've used these as both an expert and as a journalist, and have found them very useful.

Once you've lined up an interview, you should think about the main points you want to get across. While you don't want to practice so much ahead of time that you sound canned and over-rehearsed, you want to have a good grasp of your main ideas and effective ways to say them. In other words, you need to master the much-reviled sound bite—a short, pithy summary of your main point.

In most cases, you'll have ample opportunity to expand on your subject matter and your theme. It's just that the sound bite gets you started, attracts the reader's eye or the listener's ear. Once you have that attention, you can give examples and supporting data to validate your point.

For example, when I'm going to have an interview, I create a brief document outlining the five things I want to say, in a sentence or two each. Then I write a paragraph expanding on them. Then I add notes about stories I can tell to drive the point home. When I'm being

interviewed over the phone or by video (very common), I have the document in front of me and work from it. For live, in-person talks (including podcasts, radio shows, television shows, etc.) I go over the document several times before the interview — but without trying to memorize it — then relax and try to sit back and enjoy the talk.

Preparing a three-step discussion brief helps you handle any interview question or situation. For example, when the interviewer asks, "What can you do when people are rude to you?" (a topic I was asked a lot because of my traditional martial arts training), I say, "It's not about you." That's the sound bite.

Then the reporter will say, "hmm," or "oh, really?" or "Can you tell us a little more about that?" and I'll say, "When people are rude to others, it's usually because of something that's going on with them. They're running late, they're overworked, they hate their job. So when they act uncivilized, it has nothing to do with you. If you know that, you're less likely to take it personally." That's the paragraph.

Then the reporter might say, "That's so true. So tell me, what happens when it's your in-laws who are rude to you?" That's another subject, so that's another sound bite (in this case, "Set your boundaries.") Or, the reporter

might say, "Hmm . . . so it's not about you. Well, can you tell us why that makes a difference?" And then I start in with the stories that back up my point—stories that show how if you don't react defensively and don't take it personally then you don't get ruffled or hurt by other people's rudeness and you don't feel you need to react in kind, all of which makes the world a more civilized place to live in.

This kind of thing can be a little scary at first but some preparation can make the process a lot easier.

This type of preparation can also be used for any time you need to talk about your subject matter, such as at a pitch session at a conference or when a colleague asks what you write about.

Fiction Platform Basics

It's much harder to build a platform for fiction than for nonfiction because there isn't really a subject matter to talk about (except for writing, which is only interesting to other writers, not to the universe of potential readers).

For fiction, you're not trying to establish your credentials so much as find your readers. Talking about your awards and years of education isn't going to be meaningful to

someone who just wants a cozy mystery to snuggle up with tonight.

In some cases, you can link themes in your book to relevant audiences. For example, if one of your characters lives with a disease such as diabetes, you might try to find an audience of people with diabetes.

Or if your main character is a chef, you might share recipes they would make and draw in an audience of people who enjoy cooking. (I know a cookbook author who wrote a novel about a cook and did something like that!)

Other times you can link your personal background to an audience. For example, if I had written a character who was a martial artist, my nonfiction martial arts readers might have been interested in reading about her. I could have talked about how my martial arts background influenced the themes of the novel and could have expanded my audience to include anyone with interest in the martial arts, not just practicing martial artists. (I wish I'd thought of this at the time!)

But this is really only useful if all of your books will have that angle in them. You're not looking for one-off opportunities (talking about one book one time) but to establish an audience for your work over the long-term.

This means you want an audience who will come with you from book to book. What happens to the audience interested in diabetes or cooking (or martial arts) when your next book doesn't have that element? They won't be your audience anymore and you'll have to start again. (Obviously you can solve this problem by creating a niche where you continue to write about characters who have a connection to diabetes/cooking/martial arts, but this may pall after a while.)

Without these nonfiction elements that can be exploited, novelists are stuck with a fairly generic audience: "people who read mysteries." But don't despair! Just because it's harder to build your platform and promote your work doesn't mean it's impossible.

Ask yourself, where do your intended readers hang out? Consider: Where do you find authors you like to read? (I'm not talking about "word-of-mouth" which can only come after your book is published and people love it, nor am I talking about "browsing my local bookstore/library" which, again, comes after publication, usually traditional publication.)

If TikTok is the answer, then maybe that's where you should be, even if you don't like how you look on camera (no one likes how they look on camera).

If the answer is "reviews from trusted bloggers" then begin by following those blogs and learning how they choose the books they review. Consider commenting on reviews. You can build these relationships long before your book is published. As with anything, your niche is the way to go. You're not just looking for a blogger who reviews books, but for bloggers who review and love your particular type of book.

Then, look at what other authors in your genre/niche are doing. Not all of their efforts will be effective, and it can be hard to know the difference between an effort that brings sales and one that's a waste of time, but if you can get to know other authors as colleagues you can often ask them straight out: "I saw you were running an ad for your book on Facebook. How did that work out?"

Most times people are happy to tell you ("Waste of money." "Sold three books." "Spectacular! Here's what I did, and why I think it worked . . . .")

Joining genre-specific writers' organizations can be a good way to meet likeminded colleagues and to learn more about what works in your genre.

Platform Basics for All Authors

Many platform-building and promotional efforts apply to both fiction and nonfiction authors. Here are the most important.

Online Presence

Having an online presence is crucial for building your platform and (later) promoting your book(s) and perhaps other services. While you don't have to invest hours in writing a blog and learning SEO (search-engine optimization, a way to help online searchers find out that you and your website exist), you need to have at least a landing spot where readers can learn a little more about you.

Your website should include:

- An author's bio—not a resume or CV, but a narrative bio about who you are and what you do. Mention important publications and awards, especially if you're writing nonfiction, but focus on showing the reader a bit about your personality and motivation for writing about your subject matter.
- Your photograph—this makes you seem real. Let this reflect the tone of your work. If you write humorous, lighthearted fiction, a somber unsmiling

portrait probably isn't the way to go.

- Current project information—background or context information that helps people understand your book, including excerpts once it's published. Novelists sometimes include outtakes to show directions they didn't go; fans often enjoy this peek behind the scenes.
- Contact information—so that people can reach you with questions and opportunities.
- Newsletter sign-up form—so that you can capture interested people's email addresses (more on the importance of an email list later in this chapter).
- Media kit—for reporters or anyone who might be interested in reviewing your book. This gives them everything they need to have in one convenient place. This is especially important for nonfiction authors but novelists can also include it. A media kit should include the following:
  - o the book cover
  - o an author photo or two
  - o brief author bio
  - o the book description (including title, author name, publisher, ISBN, page length, and link to Amazon

and other retailers; also include how to pronounce your name if people have a tendency to mispronounce it)
- o an easy way for them to get a review copy (for example, by emailing you or reaching out to the publisher)
- o a fact sheet with five key takeaways or something similar
- o if you want to be considered for television/webcast/speaking engagements, include a link to a video of you talking about your book or subject matter; for radio/podcasts, an audio file will work.

Other options include things like Q&A pieces, links to articles you've previously written or been interviewed for (or PDFs of a select few), testimonials, and reviews (once your book has been published). A reader's guide is a great way to communicate talking points about your book. And don't forget a link to where readers can purchase the book!

For novelists, you might include information about the story world, such as a map or character sketches. After your book is

published, a book club guide is a nice addition.

Remember that when someone lands on your site, it should be immediately apparent that you're a writer and it should be immediately apparent what type of writing you do.

If you are trying to do too much with your website (especially common for writer-editors who are trying to promote both their writing and their editing), it might be better to have different websites.

For example, I have an editor website and a writer website for myself (and Club Ed itself is entirely separate), and depending on what I'm promoting, I'll give out one website address or the other. But for many years I had one website that housed everything, and that worked fine, too, I just had to be careful to integrate the two sides of my business in a way that made sense to anyone who landed there. An easy-to-use menu helped, with pages for the writer side and pages for the editor side.

I once worked with a middle-grade author whose website was more about a sport he pursued (and which had nothing to do with his book) than about his book. The site was drab and held little appeal to an eight- or ten-year-old (or their parents). The cover of the book itself was small and tucked way down on the

page. In this case, the author would have been better served to have a personal/sporting site and then a book site.

If you write romance, your website should have a romance vibe. Cookbook author? Some pretty pictures of food. Fitness expert? I better see some abs.

About Blogging

You've probably heard you need a blog, but blogs are difficult to maintain over a long period of time, and it's better not to have one at all than for your last entry to be from five years ago.

If you decide to do a blog, don't do what so many writers do and talk about how to write! That's only interesting to other writers. For nonfiction writers, a blog can be short takes on various aspects of your subject matter, excerpts from your book or the research you're doing for your book—and of course can be ongoing once your book is published.

For novelists, a blog can be about your daily life (these are waning in popularity, but someone with a clever point-of-view can still do well), about your writing process (*not* how-to, but more like a behind-the-scenes glimpse: how you got your story idea, what you do to research your story's background, etc.), or it

could be your own book reviews of novels in your genre.

Remember, you're trying to appeal to readers. What do they want to know? Try creating an editorial calendar of, say, one blog post a week for two or three months (typically, posting two or three times a week is ideal, but starting with once a week is fair). Can you think of enough posts? If not, maybe you don't need a blog.

If you decide not to write a blog, refresh your website content at least once a month or so. Even just rewriting a page will bump your website up on search results (search engines are looking for fresh, relevant content, not material from three years ago). Add new pages now and then when you have more information to share.

And consider an email newsletter as an alternative—tidbits about your life and work can be shared that way and building a newsletter list is probably a better use of your time than writing an ongoing blog.

A website is a work-in-progress, not something that's ever finished and you don't have to think about it again. If you plan for that reality ahead of time, you'll find the whole experience less frustrating.

Creating a website from scratch is a time-

consuming effort, but don't assume you have to have it perfect before launching. Get a basic page up and published and continue working on it over time. But plan how it will evolve so that you don't have to scrap it and start again.

Website Setup Basics

First, you'll want to register your domain name (the name of your website, like www.JenniferLawler.com; a URL, uniform resource locator, is just one page on a website, such as www.JenniferLawler.com/blog). You can do this through any domain registration service, such as GoDaddy.com or NameCheap.com.

You'll need to decide what website builder you're going to use: Wordpress.com is for Wordpress-hosted sites; Wordpress.org is for your own site that you host somewhere. Wordpress, Wix, and Squarespace are the ones most of the writer-editors I know use. All have pluses and minuses. I use Wordpress and always have but some people find it overly complex for their needs and it does have something of a learning curve, but it's very versatile.

It's hard to move a website from one builder to another, so this decision is fairly important because it does lock you in. Squarespace is

generally considered to be easier to use than the other two.

For most but not all website builders, you will also need a web host, which is a place to park your website. I now use managed hosting for my websites (RadiateWP.com) but used Dreamhost happily for many years. Bluehost and HostGator get good reviews.

After that, you'll need to decide on the theme of your website (a website theme governs the appearance and basic functionality of your website). I used free themes for years, and it's fine to start there. Make sure it's a theme that functions well with your website builder (Wordpress themes work best with Wordpress sites, and so on). You want one that's responsive since most people access websites on their phones or pads.

From there, it's just a matter of using the website builder's administrative dashboard to build the website. Every builder has tutorials on the process, so check these out first.

Of course, you can also hire a website designer/developer to create your website, but this is typically a fairly costly expenditure (in the thousands of dollars). An experienced virtual assistant may be able to help for less. If you see an author website you like, check to see who the designer is (that's often given at the

bottom of the website's home page).

If you have a family email address or one with an unprofessional handle (sexxxytimes@yahoo.com for a business book author), grab yourself a new Gmail account. Or, your website host may provide free email hosting as well, and it's nice to have your email address integrated with your website.

Also be aware that some email services (such as for sending out newsletters, below) will not send from a Gmail or similar address but require a domain-branded/domain-level email (Name@CompanyName.com).

Newsletter List

One of the most important assets any writer can have is an email list. This is exactly what it sounds like, a collection of email addresses for people who are interested in your work. You own this list in a way that you don't own Facebook: Facebook can lock your account for vague, unspecified reasons; someone can hack your account and deny you access, with little recourse; Facebook can suppress your posts so that few people see them and those who do aren't the right audience.

That doesn't mean you shouldn't use Facebook to build your platform, just that you shouldn't rely solely on it.

If you're in possession of people's emails, you can reach out directly to them whenever you have news to share. That is a huge advantage!

So, your website should include a way to sign up for your newsletter. I recommend using an email service such as Mailchimp or MailerLite to do this so that you don't run afoul of any laws about spam, and so that people can easily opt in and out. Most of these services have free tiers that you can use when you're first starting out.

I do recommend sending out a newsletter at least every few weeks (if not every week), even when you don't have a lot to say at first, as this will help subscribers remember that they subscribed. Your newsletter doesn't have to be long and it can just share some information about your project status or anything you think your readers might be interested in, such as a review of a book in your genre, or some interesting information you learned during the research for your historical novel.

About Social Media

Building your platform doesn't have to include social media, like Facebook and Instagram, but most authors find it helpful to create a social media presence to find their

audience and get them to buy their books. This does not have to be a gargantuan effort. Pick one social media platform that you don't hate and where you think readers of your subject matter might be found, and start there.

For example, if you write nonfiction about career advice, then LinkedIn, meant for professional networking, might be your ideal social media platform. Instagram and YouTube are where many YA readers hang out. You'll find lots of romance readers on Facebook.

Writers' organizations focused on specific genres (The Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators, Mystery Writers of America, and many others) typically offer education about these issues for authors (through online publications and discussion forums), so their membership fees are often a good investment.

Focus on building followers and engagement with your social media efforts, rather than just scrolling through endlessly. For social media, consistency and persistence count. You'll accomplish more in fifteen minutes of targeted effort every day than in bursts of several hours every couple of weeks.

If you're blogging, you can repurpose content for social media and for your newsletter list and vice versa. It's unlikely

anyone will follow you across all social media and other outlets.

Giving Talks, Seminars, and Workshops

Giving talks and presenting workshops can be an effective promotional strategy. For example, you can give a talk at your local library. You can give workshops for Chamber of Commerce members. If you write children's books, set up classroom visits where you read your book and talk about the writing process.

Depending on your subject, you can give talks, workshops, and seminars to corporations and individuals across the country (even around the world), online or in person.

The advantage of giving talks and workshops is that you can promote your books at them. In many cases, you can charge a fee that covers your time and the cost of your book, so that every attendee gets one. Some writers actually make more money giving talks and workshops than they do writing and selling their books!

While you may not feel that giving a talk at a library meeting with seven people attending will rocket you to fame and glory, remember that the process of building your platform is a

process of creating relationships with people. If you do a good job presenting to those seven attendees, an audience member will notice and may think of you for a conference she's organizing. This has happened to me—a workshop for a professional association was the direct result of my speaking at a local writers' conference.

However, remember that your efforts should not go unrewarded. If the venue isn't going to pay you and won't let you sell your books, you'd be better off spending your time finding a venue that will pay you and will let you sell your books. If you take too many itty-bitty speaking engagements, it may interfere with your ability to get larger speaking engagements. Always be sure to know what you're getting out of any promotional activity before you agree to do it.

Once you have some experience under your belt, you can put on your own workshops and seminars—that is, instead of asking or waiting for people to invite you to present at their meetings, you can create your own events, from booking the venue to advertising the event to collecting money in advance or at the venue. Creating events is easier and less expensive than ever now that you can do them online, but there is a lot of competition and it is

difficult to be seen.

Some speakers never get to this stage, being perfectly happy to pull down several thousand dollar speaking fees and letting others worry about the headaches. But some speakers find this an effective way to promote themselves and their work and put some money in their pockets.

To get started, create a brief paragraph describing the talk or workshop (or both) you could give about your subject matter. Then brainstorm places where you've heard people talk about your subject matter (annual conferences, continuing development programs, Osher Institute). Then analyze ways you can get in touch with the meeting organizers. You can search online, ask colleagues for referrals, network at association meetings.

To be hired for bigger events, you'll need to have a video of yourself in action. All you have to do is ask a friend to record you at a smaller event (or, if the event is online, get permission to record it yourself), host the video on YouTube, then share the link with organizers.

After You Get a Publishing Contract

If you're seeking traditional publication and do receive a publishing contract, remember

that the publisher will assign a publicist to your book. The publicist will also be working on twenty other books at the same time, so don't expect too much. But you'll want to work with them to coordinate your efforts.

For example, if you're based in Toledo, Ohio, and you'll be visiting family in Kansas City, let the publicist know. They may be able to book you on a local radio show. Since they don't have to pay for the travel, they will be more willing to exert some effort to set a few things up for you.

Publishers respond to authors who promote themselves. They'll often provide support (including paying some fees) if you take the lead. They put their time and money where it will pay off, so you just need to show them that investing in you will benefit them.

So Much to Promote, So Little Time

Creating a platform and promoting yourself and your work is a time-consuming endeavor. Many writers feel it takes up too much of their time—they'd rather be writing. But the truth is, most successful writer-editors spend a big chunk of their time marketing themselves in one way or another—through websites, providing content for online sites and magazines, creating newsletters, getting

interviewed in print and broadcast media, giving workshops and seminars and the like.

But you don't have to do it all at once. You don't even have to do it all. Look at what makes sense for you. If you have a bunch of preschool kids and a day job, traveling all over the country giving workshops is not going to work for you. But that doesn't mean you can't promote your work and build a platform through a carefully designed website and some social media engagement.

Start with what you can do, right now, without a lot of sweat and effort. Then gradually add another task or challenge—something that makes you stretch. Pretty soon you'll be doing all sorts of things you never believed possible—and better yet, enjoying it!

Author Checklist—All Authors

What follows is a basic timeline I recommend authors pursuing traditional publishing follow before they begin querying agents. It can also be used as the first steps for a self-publishing author to take to begin building an audience:

1. Purchase a domain name for your website if you haven't already. You will want one in your author name or some

version of it if your name is not available. Don't buy a book title domain name; your career is going to encompass more than one book. If you already have a website, you will want to make sure that it makes sense given the subject matter of your book. So, if you're a photographer in your day job, and your website is www.JonStowePhotography.com but your book is about vegan cooking, the mismatch is going to create a problem when you try to find an agent for your book. You will need a separate site to showcase your cooking expertise.

2. Start working on setting up your website if you haven't already. See the section called "Website Setup Basics" above.

3. Begin capturing contact information for a newsletter. Even if you send a newsletter only intermittently, building up your list is important to do from the very start. Then, as you get closer to book launch, you can contact your list more frequently.

4. Get a great headshot to be used on your website and in promotional materials.

Make sure the photographer grants you all rights to use the image. Try to use the same shot consistently across social media so that people recognize it as you. Make sure you pick a shot that looks good viewed at thumbnail; I have a colleague whose glasses make her look like Groucho Marx when viewed at thumbnail. Don't let that be you (unless that's your aim).

5. Create Google Alerts for your name and keywords relating to your book. This will allow you to see who talks about your subject matter, which is helpful when it comes time for book reviews, interviews, and so on.

6. Keep a running list of people, organizations, and media outlets that would be interested in the subject matter of your book. Begin the process of reaching out to them for interviews that would help solidify your credentials and build your platform.

7. As you work on your book, keep track of people recognizable to your audience who might be willing to give an

endorsement/testimonial or write a preface.

8. Create an email signature line that links to your website.

9. Build up your credentials and get attention: query online or print magazines with article ideas related to your subject, offer to write blog posts for important blogs in your niche, write letters to the editor, pitch yourself to podcasts and radio shows, offer your services as a speaker, run classes.

10. Build up your platform by creating a community you own, running a podcast in your subject matter, developing a robust newsletter list—anything that is specifically about creating an audience interested in hearing what you have to say about your subject matter.

11. Use social media to share your message, but instead of spreading yourself too thin using every medium you can think of, pick one or two that you enjoy using and focus on those. Bear in mind that X (formerly Twitter) is in great turmoil at

the moment, and that Facebook pages (often used to promote authors and their books in the past) are rarely shown to followers (as compared to Facebook profiles). It is much harder to get traction for a page than for a profile; tread carefully before investing in advertisements as these can be a money sink with little reward. Make sure you're investing in the social media platform that your audience consumes.

12. Create a blog only if you'll be able to update it at least once or twice a week. You can repurpose the material to use in social media. Some attention to SEO can help you gain attention to your blog/website.

Chapter Seven: Profiting from Other Types of Writing

In this chapter, I'm going to expand beyond books and talk about other types of writing you can do for pay. I'll give an overview of how to get started in each area.

Short Stories and Poetry

Creative-minded authors often write short stories and poetry but like most creative work, these typically don't earn much money. That doesn't mean these endeavors aren't worth doing, it just means that they probably won't be the way you'll ever pay the rent.

Literary magazines are the principal places such efforts are published, and in some cases such publication can lead to bigger things (like a book deal) but usually not. Literary publications typically pay very little, if anything. Often payment is merely a few copies of the issue in which your work appears.

There are a few genre-related magazines that publish short stories. You can find these with search terms like "mystery + magazine."

As with literary magazines, these genre magazines typically pay little but can sometimes lead to bigger things.

As with books, short stories and poems can be self-published (on a blog or in a chapbook or collection) if that's your preference. Short stories can also be used as giveaways to introduce readers to the characters in your novels (assuming there is some crossover between them). For story and poetry collections, the information about querying and promoting books will help you find your audience.

For finding literary magazines to pitch your stories and poems to, check out the Poets & Writers finder at PW.org/literary_magazines.

In most cases, you'll send the entire poem or short story to the publication, but read the submission guidelines first. Many of these types of publications have restricted reading periods, such as from January to April of each year. Submissions sent outside of that reading period will be summarily rejected.

Sometimes authors band together to create anthologies that they self-publish or pitch to a traditional publisher. And book publishers often put together anthologies of short fiction. The best way to learn about these opportunities is to follow publishers that

publish them and to network with your colleagues.

Personal Essays

Personal essays, which have a memoir element, actually do sometimes generate spendable income.

These are often published in magazines and newspapers, print and online, as well as in book collections and in other places. I've had personal essays published in consumer magazines (such as *Family Circle*), in book collections (such as the Chicken Soup for the Soul series), in specialty publications (such as *Neurology Now*), in an alumni publication, as well as on my blog. I once sold an essay to a social media app that wanted to showcase its storytelling abilities.

Most of these opportunities paid hundreds of dollars (in some cases more than $1500).

The type of essay most likely to find a home (and a paycheck) is one that moves beyond your personal experience and embeds it in a larger issue that is of interest to readers. For example, if you want to talk about the dearth of mental health care in the US, you could discuss your personal experience finding mental health care while also reporting on the trend. You would need to investigate why

mental health care is so difficult to access, and you would interview experts and read the research on the topic.

This research would provide the framework and the relevance for your story and your story would create the connection to readers. This type of reported essay is very common and well worth exploring if you're a memoirist who is interested in writing at a shorter length (most of these types of essays run no more than about 2,000 words).

Typically you contact the editor of your target publication with the completed essay and they will say whether they want to publish it or not. In some cases they will want to see a pitch describing what your essay is/will be about. See the section "Query Letters for Articles" below for more on how to write these types of pitches/queries.

Many of these outlets have writers' guidelines on their websites, which are worth a read before you finalize your essay. You may find that your 5,000-word essay on the impact of climate change is 3,000 words too long for any of the publications that might be interested in running it. Better to know that kind of thing before you get too far along.

Find an example of the writers' guidelines for a magazine that publishes first-person

pieces (what I'm calling reported essays) and personal essays at Bustle.com by searching Bustle + writers guidelines.

To explore more about essay writing for fun and profit, I recommend anything by Amy Paturel on the subject of writing and selling essays.

For creative work you're seeking to publish in the traditional way, always be sure to retain your rights. Many publications seek all rights, which means that you cannot publish the story elsewhere without their permission, even though it's your story!

Journalism and Article Writing

If you're reporting information for your essay, it's not a huge stretch to do actual reporting and writing, such as journalists do. Many online and print periodicals pay reasonable fees to writers who can do research and interview experts in order to produce service pieces (how-to and self-help), features (human interest), profiles, and so on.

You can start with an idea for an article ("How to Survive the Holidays with Your Dysfunctional Family") and then figure out who might publish it. I just saw an article like this in the *Washington Post*, but you could imagine it in women's magazines, websites

like Slate, and others.

Once you have the idea, you write a brief description of it, including what research you'll do and who you'll talk to (because journalism/article-writing isn't about just sharing your thoughts and experiences but about finding and sharing expert information). Then you email this query letter (often called a pitch letter; see more on this below) to the editor who handles the section of the outlet that would be likely to publish the piece. For example, you would send a pitch about a food trend piece to the food editor, not the features editor.

When I do this type of work, I typically start with the outlet I want to write for. For example, when *Family Circle* was still being published, I wanted to write for them because I knew they published parenting articles (which I wrote) and paid well. So I read several issues cover-to-cover, reviewed the table of contents, and got a feel for the kinds of pieces they published, the typical word count, and the type of tone. Then I pitched stories based on what I saw in the magazine. I had a 75% success rate with this company taking this approach.

To find potential places to pitch your articles, think of the sites and publications that you read and look for submission guidelines;

it's always best to be familiar with an outlet before you try pitching an article for it. You can also Google "magazines that accept freelance pitches" and similar keywords. Colleagues are also a great source of information about where to pitch article ideas.

Once you've established a relationship with an outlet, they will often start assigning you pieces ("Hey, we need something on surviving summer vacation at your dysfunctional family's house!"), which makes the process even more lucrative because you don't have to research and pitch ideas that will be shot down.

Query Letters for Articles

The query letter/pitch letter for a nonfiction article is a little different from the one I described for pitching books, but it's the same general idea. You're trying to sell the editor on buying your idea and hiring you to write it.

Before you write the query letter, be sure you're familiar with the outlet you're targeting and look for writers' guidelines.

Open with a hook that catches attention, such as an interesting statistic or a problem the outlet's readers are likely to have. Then outline how you'll address this in your article, including a brief description of the content

(don't forget the anticipated word count) and research you'll do and experts you'll interview. Include a little bit about yourself so that the editor can feel like you'll do a good job writing the piece. Prior publishing credits are helpful but anything that shows your credentials, such as a journalism degree or related experience, will help.

Sample Article Query Letter

Here's an example of a pitch that sold:

>Dear Editor:
>
>"Oh, they say they're going to stop buying lattes," the barista confided to me with a knowing smile as she poured steamed milk into the espresso. "But they'll be back. People get tired of frugality."
>
>Isn't that the truth. To be sure, it's often an unexpected transmission problem or the dishwasher flooding the kitchen that busts your budget, but just as often, you simply get tired of frugality after a while. For the same reason we can start the morning with good intentions only to be eating Snickers bars by lunch time,

a lot of stresses and pressures wear away at our resolve to stick to our budgets. But like a dog you let up on the furniture just this once, easing up on frugal efforts can leave you with a battle on your hands.

I'd love to write a 1,500 word article for you on "10 Ways to Fight Frugality Fatigue." These will be strategies anyone can use no matter what their budget is, not specific money-saving tips. I'll talk to money-saving experts and moms who've kept family budgets on track for years. Plus, I'll draw on my own experiences.

For example, when I cut loose a major client to focus more time on my fiction, I created a vision board to remind me of the future I was trying to create for myself. Now every time the temptation to buy a new pair of (unbudgeted) shoes makes my resolve waver, I look at the board and I remember why I'm doing this. The life I want for myself and my daughter is way more important than any new pair

of shoes. Not incidentally, I've sold two romances since I made my switch, something that definitely reinforces my determination. I keep copies of those books right on the shelf above my computer as another visual reminder.

Having a reminder is the cornerstone of another strategy, which is to count your accomplishments. For some people, this might mean creating a graph to hang on the wall that shows their debt going down or their savings going up.

Another strategy includes enlisting a buddy—whether this is your spouse or just your friend—to whom you're being accountable. I'll also talk about keeping a gratitude list to help overcome your internal whiner, how to make an attitude adjustment so that browsing through garage sales on a Saturday morning is a fun activity instead of a chore you resent, and several other strategies.

I've written for NAMES OF SEVERAL MAGAZINES. I'd be

happy to send clips. May I write this article for you?

Sincerely,

This pitch was longer than many editors would look for because this particular publication wanted to see fully fleshed-out ideas. Some editors prefer a briefer pitch. This is the kind of information you can find out from reading writers' guidelines and connecting with your colleagues.

Content Writing

If you're really serious about earning money from your writing and you're not picky about what kind of writing it is, you should probably consider content writing (often called content marketing writing). This is sponsored writing (that is, the organization you're writing about is paying you to do it) that you see all over the internet from companies—blog posts, website content of all kinds, social media posts, and so on.

The idea isn't that you're advertising a particular service ("Buy Acme Corp's widget!"), it's that you're creating trust by talking about problems potential customers have. For example, a mattress company could talk about how to choose a mattress, how to

pick the right size, how to dispose of an old mattress, how to decide if you need a mattress topper, and so on—all things related to mattresses but not specifically saying "Buy our mattresses!" That's implied, not stated.

I do content marketing writing when I write about the challenges freelance editors face. This is intended to promote my company, Club Ed. I share these on my blog, on LinkedIn, and in my newsletter. The idea is that editors will find me a trustworthy source of information and therefore they'll take my classes. (And they do.)

Content writing is the least creative of the types of writing I've been discussing in this section, and so for most novelists and memoirists, it's largely unappealing. But it can be something you do to pay the rent while giving you the time and space you need to do your own creative work. That said, if you're interested in the subject matter (like I'm interested in writing about editing), this can be a fun and creative exercise.

Content writing can be a lot of work for a few pennies or it can be fairly lucrative for the time spent, depending on what kinds of clients you have. Focusing on platforms like Reedsy and Upwork means you'll mostly get nickel-and-dime clients. That can be okay when

you're first starting out and need to gain some experience, but most writers make the mistake of sticking with these (sometimes exploitive) platforms for too long.

Finding your own clients can be intimidating and scary, and that's why people get stuck on these low-paying treadmills. They don't know how to reach out to corporations and other organizations and develop their own clients.

This does not have to be very complicated (find the person in charge of content for a corporation and send them a letter of introduction—more on that in a bit) but it can take a certain amount of bravery and the ability to tolerate no reply at all—not to mention the thick skin needed to accept rejection (you'll hear an awful lot of "no" in this business).

If you don't mind the rejection and get good at content writing you may find that you can help companies strategize their efforts, so that they're not just saying "Buy my mattress!" This type of strategic thinking is often more lucrative than the writing itself.

I know many successful content writers but it is not an appealing niche to me (which is why I focus on getting editing clients rather than content-writing clients). If you think it might be something you'd be interested in exploring

(especially if you have an in-demand subject-matter expertise, such as health or technical), the go-to person I would recommend reading and following is Jennifer Goforth Gregory (JenniferGregoryWriter.com).

Letter of Introduction

A letter of introduction (LOI) is like a query letter, but what you're pitching are your skills, not an article idea or a book. You send it to someone who hires writers for a company (more on this in a moment). The LOI is brief—you're not trying to get someone to *hire* you based on it, you're trying to get them to call/email you for more information.

When you send out an LOI, you should paste it into the body of the email you're sending, not as an attachment. Most people won't open an attachment from a stranger and many organizations have spam-blocking tools that will block any email with an attachment from senders that haven't been okayed by the recipient, which means all of your effort won't even get to the person you're targeting.

Your subject line should be clear: "Content writer seeking freelance work" or "My background—JaneDoe from Threads." Not "Hello!" (In fact I have an email rule that all emails with the subject line of "Hello" or "Hi"

go directly to the junk mail folder, as it is a sure sign of spam, and I'm probably not the only one who does this.)

Open with a description of why you're writing ("I noticed you posted a need for content writers on LinkedIn"; "I'm a content writer in INDUSTRY and I wanted to introduce myself"; "We follow each other on Threads and you suggested I get in touch with details about my background"). Then provide your credentials in a quick, easy-to-read way. Close with a request for a time to talk further. I've included a sample LOI below.

Identifying Who Should Receive Your LOI

To find someone to send your LOI to, first, you need to identify an organization that uses content writers and for which you have at least some credentials that would make them consider hiring you. For example, suppose you once sold furniture, so you know a little bit about what people look for when they purchase bedroom furniture. And suppose my remarks in this book about writing blog posts for a mattress company piqued your interest.

You would do a little Googling, looking for "mattress company + blog" since any site with a blog needs someone to write it, and you'd see

that MattressFirm.com springs up (haha).

You poke around their website and you see they've got articles, they send out a newsletter, they even do a podcast. Pay dirt! All of those need content, which means that this is the kind of company that needs you.

Now, how do you find someone in this company to send your LOI to? A generic customer service email address is not going to be the answer. So, you look at the links in the footer. There's an "About" link that sounds promising but it doesn't lead to the name of anyone who might be interested in hearing from you.

Try "Newsroom" (or anything like that: Media, Press, etc.). This is where the corporate office information will be found and that's what you want. On this website, clicking on Newsroom leads to all kinds of possibilities: there's "Leadership" and "Press Releases" and so on. You click on "Media Contacts" because you need the name of someone. Lo and behold! There's a bunch of communications people you can reach out to directly.

The communications people are worth a shot if that's all you can find. But if you can locate a marketing contact, that's even better (as content marketing writing, as it is sometimes called, often falls under the

umbrella of the marketing team). So you noodle around a little more and under "Leadership" you find the name of the head of marketing. This would be the perfect person to send your LOI to. But there's no email address for this person.

However, all is not lost! The communications/media contacts page shows you how emails are typically set up: firstname.lastname@mfrm.com. So you pop the marketing person's name in that template and send off your LOI. (Good luck!)

Another option: use the hunter.io tool to find email addresses. You can also use LinkedIn to track down email addresses. Or, failing that, you can send an InMail to a potential client.

I also like to use LinkedIn to get the names of people who work at a target company and to do a little more exploration to find out if they're open to working with freelancers (sometimes their LinkedIn posts will show this).

For information on custom publishers, check out CustomPublishingCouncil.com. Custom publications are sponsored publi-cations that tend to be more like newsletters and magazines (whether print or online) than a blog post or website content, but all of those

pages have to be filled with content, and that's where you come in.

The audience for an organization's custom content is not always the same as their clientele. For example, a hospital may have an internal newsletter for employees. That is not the same audience as the one for their monthly healthcare magazine. Both need writers.

Even if you didn't have any subject matter expertise in health care, you might have some in human resources, and therefore might be able to contribute to the employee newsletter (although to be fair the employee newsletter might be written in-house by the human resources department—but it doesn't hurt to ask).

I once edited and wrote for a custom publication for members of a martial arts organization, and everyone who wrote for that publication (including me) was a freelancer.

For content writing, some knowledge of how SEO works, of how to write content that features a keyword/keywords, and how to find the keyword(s) in a specific niche can help separate you from competitors.

Once you send an LOI, you may or may not get a response; radio silence is pretty typical. But keep on working on it. Don't forget to follow up occasionally on LOIs you've sent, as

it's easy for the recipient to overlook or forget about you until they really need some help. With persistence and the right kind of skills, eventually you'll get a bite.

You'll probably have more luck with smaller and/or local companies at first, and as with any freelancing, finding colleagues who know the ropes will help smooth your way.

Be aware that you may need to send a hundred of these out to get a nibble; take your time and tweak your LOI as you gain more insight into how this business works.

Sample LOI

Here's an example of an LOI I sent to a company that created content for several different brands:

> I'm a full time freelancer with plenty of custom publishing experience under her belt. As part of the launch team for *COMPANY*'S PERIODICAL, I conceived the editorial design and helped create the overall look and feel. As editor, I develop each issue's lineup, assign articles, develop freelancers and serve as liaison with the client. I generally

write the cover story and several of the departments.

But I also freelance for other publications—and I'm hoping you'll consider me for one of yours. In the last ten years, I've written and edited for custom publishers, consumer magazines, online sites and book publishers. Clients have included NAMES OF CORPORATE CLIENTS, *Cooking Light*, *Writer's Digest*, bankrate.com, McGraw-Hill, Wiley, Penguin Putnam and many others.

Services I can provide include:

- Interviewing and reporting on trends and business and consumer issues
- Writing how-to and self-help articles
- Editing—assigning articles and editing for style and voice
- Conceptual and creative work in editorial
- Developmental editing

for longer projects

I've attached a recent issue of
COMPANY'S PUBLICATION. I'd
be delighted to send additional
clips or provide further
information about my experience
or to schedule a time to talk. Thank
you for your time.
All best,

Connect the Dots

While some of these ways of getting paid for
your writing are likely to be more appealing to
you than others, developing an area of
expertise can help you create a writer-editor
career where the pieces connect together:
perhaps you're a psychologist in your day job
and you write self-help articles for websites
and you're working on a memoir about how
becoming a psychologist helped you address
your own trauma.

You can see how all of these parts fit
together and mutually reinforce each other in a
way that working a day job as an accountant
and writing about heavy equipment for a
custom publication while also finishing your
spy novel does not.

While it's true that at the beginning, you'll

be like everyone else and just trying to get someone, anyone, to pay you for your work, the more strategically you think about putting together your writer-editor career, the easier it will be to maintain and the more likely it is that you'll be successful.

Chapter Eight: Book Doctoring, Ghostwriting, and Coauthoring

You can also use your writing skills to coauthor, ghostwrite, and book doctor other people's books. Though it helps to have some editorial knowledge to do this work (because being able to diagnose story and structure problems helps), the primary skills you need are writing-related: being able to structure content effectively, using friendly and easy-to-understand language, doing your work without a lot of grammatical errors or other problems (like not checking your facts).

If you do at least some work as a story editor, you'll naturally have opportunities to add book doctoring and ghostwriting/coauthoring to your skillset/services as these are all a natural outgrowth of offering editorial services.

In the editing section, I'll discuss how to land indie author and publisher clients for this type of work, but since these services rely so heavily on writing skills, I'm including the overview discussion in the section on writing.

Book Doctoring

Book doctoring goes far beyond editing into actually rewriting the manuscript (whether fiction or nonfiction). As the book doctor, if you're working for a publishing company, you will often work with a developmental or acquisitions editor who defines the problems to be solved, but in other instances you may be the one both identifying the problems and fixing them (such as when working with an indie author).

The main difference between an editor and a book doctor is in who does the actual revision. In developmental editing, that's the author. In book doctoring, that's the book doctor.

If you've ever seen a manuscript that has a lot going wrong with it, then you know that there's a need for people who can fix problem manuscripts.

For some indie authors, they're invested more in getting the book published (such as with a memoir) than they are with learning the craft and growing their skills (which is what they'll learn from a developmental edit). If an author feels like they're done with working on a story but it's not ready for publication, they may be interested in having a book doctor finish up the process for them.

Similarly, if you work with book publishers, you'll find that occasionally manuscripts need a lot of revision and the author sometimes isn't capable of doing the work. This is more common in nonfiction than fiction for two reasons: (1) in nonfiction, the author is often an expert and they've been contracted for their expertise, not their writing ability and (2) nonfiction is sold by proposal, not by finished manuscript, so the delivered manuscript may need a lot more work than the publisher/acquisitions editor expected.

But it can happen in fiction, too, especially if a celebrity has been hired to write a novel, or when a two- or three-book deal has been made before the second (or third) novel has been written. When delivered, these subsequent books sometimes aren't up to the standard of the first. If the first was successful enough, the publisher will bring in a book doctor to fix the next book (rather than merely canceling the contract).

While ghostwriters and coauthors are usually attached to a project from the beginning, book doctors usually come in after a draft has been delivered and the author has unsuccessfully attempted revision.

Sometimes the book doctor will be brought in before the author attempts revision if

deadlines are imminent or the publisher has reason to believe the author won't be successful (author complains that they don't know how to do the revision or claims not to have time) and the publisher still wants to go ahead with the book.

Book doctoring typically costs a lot because the time investment is much more significant. It is not uncommon for these to be five-figure jobs ($10,000 or more per project).

Ghostwriting

Ghostwriting entails actually writing a book (whether fiction or nonfiction) for another person, who publishes it under their name. This is common in fields like celebrity memoir. The ghostwriter is usually uncredited (their name does not appear on the cover or anywhere else), though sometimes the ghost (as they're called) will be thanked in the acknowledgments, often with a phrase like, "Thanks to Jane Doe for her editorial help" where "editorial help" = "all the writing."

The "as told to" line in a book (or article) is a way to give credit to the ghost without actually calling them the author or coauthor.

As a ghost, you'll often be bound by nondisclosure agreements; you need to take this seriously and not talk about the project.

Coauthoring

Coauthoring is writing a book with someone else, with both (or all) authors getting cover credit. (Rarely are books written by more than two people unless it's a collection or anthology, but it does occasionally occur.) Usually coauthor pairs include a subject-matter expert and a writer, but they can be two experts, if both experts are competent writers.

In the case of a subject-matter expert and author pair, coauthoring can be very similar to ghostwriting, except that your name will go on the cover/in the byline.

Ghostwriting and coauthoring are similar (the main difference being whether you're credited or not). These roles are easier to break into if you're a writer first, unlike book doctoring, which is easier to break into if you're an editor first. For my book doctoring gigs, I have emphasized my editorial experience. For ghosting and coauthoring, my writing chops.

What to Know

My nonfiction agent was instrumental in getting me a lot of my ghosting and coauthoring gigs and also helped ensure that I was paid fairly. These gigs were in the $25-40K range but some ghosts/coauthors make a lot

more than that (and to be fair many make a lot less). So, this is one way you can build on a traditional publishing career if you're interested in going that route.

For traditionally published books, ghosts usually get a split of the royalties (money paid to the author based on the number of copies sold) in addition to an upfront fee. Royalties are an unreliable source of income and whether a book is successful or not has very little to do with you. Make sure you're being compensated upfront for your work and consider the royalty split to be icing on the cake.

Coauthors usually split the advance and royalties in half (or divide them by the number of authors if more than two), but this can be adjusted based on an agreement between the authors, for example if one is expected to do more work than the other(s).

Most ghosts are paid out of the author's advance (the money a publisher gives the author on contract signing based on the royalties/income they project the author will receive). If the advance is not large enough to cover your services, the author may need to supplement out of their own personal funds.

You're not expected to promote books you ghostwrite but you may be expected to

promote books you coauthor, if you are considered an expert contributor.

I consider coauthoring a subset of ghosting since the considerations are similar but there are some unique concerns. One of the most important of these is vetting the content and the other author(s). Since your name is on the cover and publicly associated with the book, you will want to be sure you're okay with the content and with being associated with your coauthor.

As with ghosting, you will often work out a split of royalties, but unless this project is your own creative brainchild, you shouldn't rely on royalties to be paid for your time. Most books don't earn out (that is, pay the author more than the advance) and this is especially true of books with a niche audience. And, of course, self-published books don't earn advances at all, only royalties, so these authors will need to pay you out of pocket.

While all of these services can be very lucrative, they're also highly competitive. One of the best ways to get this kind of work is to get known for being able to fix problem manuscripts, which is something you can do as a byproduct of marketing your writing and/or editing services.

Necessary Skills and Aptitude

The skills you need for all of these roles include being a good writer, knowing how to adapt your writing style to the audience's needs and the credited author's style, and having a good eye for developmental problems, both so you can identify them when you encounter them and also so you don't cause them in your work.

Whether you're working with indie authors or traditional publishers, you have to be a fast worker and deadline driven. Many projects come up because some problem has arisen at the last minute: the author has turned in a substandard manuscript but the book is scheduled to be on bookstore shelves in four months; the indie author has committed to a marketing blitz but realizes six weeks out that they'll never finish the job in time. If all the stars have to align perfectly for you to be able to meet the deadline, it's better to turn down the job.

Whether working for publishers or indie authors, you have to be able to follow guidelines, adhere to an outline, and not take edits or criticisms personally. I was once told my ghosting sounded too much like a woman's voice, and I had to figure out how a male voice was different!

Questions to Ask

Suppose you've done some work for a publishing company (maybe you've written a book they've published or you've done some editorial work) and they come to you with a book doctoring project. Before you say yes, what should you do to make sure you'll succeed?

First, you need to establish the parameters of the project and to do that you'll need to ask some questions.

What are the deliverables of the project/the project scope?

Deliverables are the materials you'll be delivering to the client by the deadline.

For a book doctoring project, this might just mean rewriting a manuscript that an acquisitions editor has already determined needs help. The deliverable is the revised ms.

For a ghostwriting project, this might mean creating an outline, getting it approved, writing the manuscript, responding to a developmental editor's feedback and making any necessary changes, revising based on the copyedits, and checking the galley to make sure no egregious errors have slipped through.

You can see the book doctoring project would take a lot less time than the

ghostwriting project. The assignment or project brief should describe what the deliverables are (more on assignment briefs below).

What are the projected deadlines and will they fit with your current workload?

Every freelancer sometimes takes on more work than they really should, but there's a difference between having to work a couple of Saturday mornings and not being able to say goodnight to your children for six months.

"To the editor (book doctor/ghost)" deadlines are not always carved in stone for publishers, as an author may miss *their* deadline. But book doctoring and ghosting/coauthoring usually start fairly early in the process so while quick turnaround is expected, a breakneck pace is not.

Note that deadlines can sometimes be pushed back to accommodate your needs. Because book doctoring and ghosting/coauthoring happen earlier in the process than copyediting and proofreading, adjustments can be made down the line, or the expected publication date can be moved if it's well enough in advance.

What state is the project in?

Having a completed draft that contains most of the necessary information is one thing; having a mere outline of what the manuscript needs to contain is another.

Be sure to review the manuscript itself (if there is one); an acquisitions editor/client might say the content is mostly there but if your review shows that you'll have to do a lot of research to fill in the blanks, the proposed fee may need to be adjusted.

How much access to the author will you have?

Sometimes an author will just hand off the manuscript or outline and not be available for further consultation until they review your manuscript. That means that instead of asking the author to please provide the citation for the study they mention in Chapter Twelve, you're going to have to hunt it down yourself.

If you'll have to do a lot of research and fact-checking, you're going to have to charge more than if the content is basically already there and you just need to shape it.

How many project meetings will you be expected to attend?

It's common for staffers to want to "jump on a call" with you or ask you to attend a three-hour editorial meeting so that you can give a status update.

But meetings eat into your time and most aren't necessary. If possible, negotiate to pare these back: you can email the project status to the acquisitions editor and the acquisitions editor can give your status update to the editorial committee without your having to be there. But do count on having a project launch meeting and (depending on the project) at least one author interview.

What is the budget for the project and is it realistic?

If the company is offering a thousand dollars for you to ghostwrite a 50,000 word book, that should be a hard no.

But in some cases an inadequate fee can be negotiated higher if you describe all the work that is needed for the project. For example, if a project will require extensive research, you can point this out. But don't expect a thousand dollars to turn into ten thousand dollars. I've never seen that happen and I doubt you will either.

If the original quote is too low, it's probably best to walk away. A fee is typically not going to get much more than 20 percent higher (though it's always fair to ask for more and be willing to settle for 20 percent). Make sure that the fee is big enough that you won't grow to resent the project when it encounters the inevitable snags.

You can also negotiate the fee by changing the deliverables. For example, you might be willing to do one revision of a project for the offered fee if the author does all of the rest of the project (such as responding to the copyedit, reviewing the galleys, etc.)

The Assignment Brief

When working for publishers and other corporations, you may get an evaluation of what needs to be done on the project that has already been prepared before you come aboard.

An assignment brief (also called the project brief or creative brief) will summarize (thus "brief") what the deliverables are and what is expected of you. For nonfiction books there will typically be a book proposal, for fiction an outline and synopsis. (If you are working directly with an author who is seeking traditional publication, you may need to write

these materials yourself; charge separately for them.)

If you're brought on after the proposal/ outline has been written, review it and make sure you understand the project scope.

Typically, the client is not asking you to weigh in on the type of content being produced ("I think it would be better if you open with Chapter 3"). The job is to write the book according to the specifications, not to argue about them. However, if you notice a glaring problem—the proposed content can't possibly become a 60,000-word book, for example— then it's perfectly fair to say so in order to find out whether some information is missing or if the brief can be adjusted.

Another exception is when an assignment brief has not been created, in which case you will most likely need to deliver an editorial plan (see below). Also, when working with indie authors and businesses where writing is not what they're selling, you may need to help guide their content. So if your indie author's book outline has chronology problems, you can point them out. If the global Instapot company wants you to write recipes, you can suggest that including the metric measurements is a good idea.

Assignment Brief Example

Here's an example of what an assignment brief might look like:

Title: With Love from Rome, An Italian Cookbook

imprint: Acme Publishers

category: Cookbook

What is this book about:

Offers more than 150 easy and affordable recipes that use whatever the reader has on hand—be it spices, sauces, oils, or dressings—to turn boring proteins like beans and hamburger into delicious Italian dishes

reader demographic:

Mothers with two or three children and the need to cook within a budget. Age 25-45

structure:

One recipe per page. Sidebars throughout. They can be placed anywhere on the page but must stay with the recipe they've been assigned to

[The structure area would also say if callouts, quotes, boxed text, extracts, case studies, checklists,

worksheets, tables, templates, dialogue, poems/lyrics, recipes, timeline, summaries, screenshots, or any art is expected. Typically, you won't be expected to supply art but may need to provide guidance and scratch art to the art department so they know what to do.]

design direction:
Friendly, easy cooking ideas with a hip, Tuscan flare

consumer pitch:
Busy cooks can use what they have in their cupboards to turn boring chicken breasts, ground beef and other typical proteins into delicious, tempting meals

Reading the Brief

As you can see, the sample brief itself has several different audiences. The point about sidebars being placed anywhere on the page is directed to the layout/production department, and the design direction is meant for the art department.

While not all of the information applies to you it is helpful for you to know as you plan. The "hip, Tuscan flare" points in the design

direction can tell you that boring a pasta-and-marinara-sauce dish is probably not going to fly.

You can also see that the brief requires more than 150 recipes and that "easy" is going to be important, so time-consuming recipes with complex steps are not going to be acceptable. Similarly, the emphasis on using ingredients cooks have on hand means that recipes calling for lemongrass stalks and dried lavender buds are probably missing the point.

You will probably have a few questions before proceeding: where are those 150+ recipes coming from? Will you be writing them? Or merely fleshing out material that an author has already provided? Will you have to go through the entire editorial process or just deliver the manuscript? Etc. But reading the assignment brief will help you understand the scope of the project and whether it's something you'd be interested in taking on.

Writing an Editorial Plan

If you're brought on board to fix a problem manuscript (book doctoring), you may need to provide an editorial plan before you begin work. This type of plan outlines the needed revisions and rewrites for a particular manuscript. It can also be used with indie

authors to share your plan and set expectations for your work.

A good editorial plan includes all of the things that need to be done to bring the work up to par. If you've taken my DE classes, you'll know I often talk about discussing no more than three-to-five developmental problems with the author, as it is easy for the author to get overwhelmed and they can't be expected to accomplish everything in one round of revision.

That is not the case with book doctoring. In book doctoring, you will need to identify every problem and have a plan for solving it. So, if everything from the plot to the prose needs to be addressed in your work, you will need to say so. This is important because it will help you provide an appropriate project quote for the project and set reasonable expectations regarding the deadline. If the client thinks the manuscript just needs to be "cleaned up" then the fee and the deadline will be a lot lower than if the manuscript needs to be wholly rewritten, information researched and written up, and every sentence polished.

What an Edit Plan Includes

An edit plan includes an overview of what the purpose and audience of the book is, a brief

summary evaluation of the manuscript, and suggested actions. This is brought to the editorial committee and reviewed. The edit committee may suggest additional work or may decide not to invest in as much work. The revised edit plan, based on this input, is the one you should work from.

When your work is completed, it will be compared against the edit plan, and receiving your final compensation will depend on your delivering an adequate rework of the material.

Therefore, if you make any changes in your edit plan, you will need to communicate that to the AE/edit committee. The AE may need to approve any changes before you implement them.

Publishers usually have a form that is used to communicate the editorial plan ("edit plan document" "transmittal memo" "review form" and so on), and it may also include questions about explicitness and triggers; one publisher I worked for always wanted book doctors to flag "any radical ideas" that might be controversial.

Editorial Plan Example

Here's an example of what such a plan could look like.

Manuscript Review Form

Acquiring Editor: John Doe
Reviewing Editor: Jane Smith
Date Sent for Review: 9/12/24
Title: Book Learning Beats Street Smarts: 100 Examples of Brainiacs Succeeding in the Real World
Author: Joe Kerouac
Current word count: 37,141
Expected/contracted word count: 50,000-55,000

Manuscript Assessment
Description of manuscript: The only guide that shows how being able to solve problems scientifically is better than knowing how to punch a mugger.

The book contains one hundred examples of how smart people have succeeded because of their brains; book smarts triumph over street smarts.

Each entry includes an introduction/explanation of a specific time when a brainiac succeeded (including at least ten examples of a time when a book smart person

has won some contest against a street smart person), a section called "Example Deconstructed," that will be about what readers can learn from the example, and a section tentatively called "Go Forth," which will show how to implement the book smarts illustrated in the example. Each entry will be 500 to 550 words.

The book includes an introduction of about 1,000 words.

The tone is humorous, yet highbrow and academic; the demographic of the book is men and women ages 18 to 65 who think of themselves as intelligent and educated.

Manuscript acceptable (content, prose, word count, etc.)? Explain any no answer. No. The author hasn't included enough material; about half of the examples are missing one of the three sections, the tone is off, and the introduction to the book has not been provided (further details below).

Suggestions for Improvement:
- Each of the 100 examples needs all three sections: introduction, Example Deconstructed and Go Forth. Right now, only about fifty have

all three so the missing pieces will have to be researched and added.

- None of the examples are of a contest between a book smart person and someone street smart; at least ten of these will need to be researched and included.
- An introduction needs to be written. We asked for the Introduction to be about 1,000 words, but none has been delivered. One will need to be written, focusing on why the reader would want to pick up this book and what they can expect to gain from reading it.
- Some of the entry titles don't match the entry. For example, "Louis Pasteur Pastes the Competition" doesn't mention any competition at all. These will need to be revised so that titles and contents match.
- Rework titles to be more pithy and to avoid lowbrow wording.
- In some cases the focus is on a scientific achievement but not the smart person behind it. For example, the entry on the Higgs boson doesn't name any scientist at all. This is too generic to meet the purpose of the book.
- The tone is too lowbrow to meet the criteria and the humor is strained. For example, in the entry on Albert Einstein says, "It's not every day a wild-haired nerd upends every single thing we know about the universe!" A more

highbrowed approach would be something like "Albert Einstein, famously known for his uncombed hair and emphatic persona, also devised a theory of relativity that revolutionized the field of physics." Similarly the humor is a bit sophomoric in places. The commentary on Charles Darwin is an example: "Put that in your pipe and smoke it, doubters!"

- Some facts are incorrect: Marie Curie was Polish and a naturalized French citizen, not Belgian. All facts will need to be double-checked.

Have permissions been obtained? Yes.
Anything offensive in the manuscript? No.
Is a technical review required? No.

Most of the work in book doctoring and ghosting is about delivering what an author isn't able to. If you're a skilled writer, you may find your services are in high demand!

Part Three

Overview of the Editing Side

Chapter Nine: What Freelance Editors Do

Freelance editors, like staff editors, prepare written manuscripts for publication by identifying and solving big-picture issues (such as structural issues or plot problems) as well as addressing sentence-level issues such as awkwardly stated sentences and grammar errors. Several different types of editing exist, which I briefly described in Chapter Four and which I'll discuss more fully in a moment.

Most editors don't do every kind of editing, although many do more than one. For example, I began as a copy editor and then became a developmental editor. I still do some copyediting though most of my work is in development. I've never been a professional proofreader and have only done it incidentally (such as proofreading my own work or reviewing galleys during the book production process to make sure egregious errors don't slip through). I began working in nonfiction and switched to fiction and now I do some of both.

Freelancers get editorial work (1) directly with authors and (2) with publishing companies, book packagers, and hybrid publishers. Nonfiction editors can also work with other types of corporations, but fiction editors focus on these two types of clients. An editor can, of course, edit both fiction and nonfiction, but because they are different skills, each has a learning curve. It's best to start with one and then learn the other.

Author clients sometimes need an editor because they're self-publishing and want to present their best work, other times because they're seeking traditional publishing contracts and want to be sure their work is in good shape before they begin the querying process.

If the author is seeking traditional publishing, I'm likely to make some editorial recommendations differently than if I know they're indie publishing or just writing for themselves.

This came up recently in a memoir class I teach. Getting a memoir traditionally published these days is extremely hard, and just a basic memoir about, say, addiction and recovery or disease and repercussions is unlikely to get any attention.

An author writing such a memoir would

need to know that and we could discuss angles that might make the book more appealing to publishers or dig out some other aspect of the author's life to showcase in the memoir.

For an indie publishing author, we might still talk about ways to make the memoir stand out but I would be much less concerned about the competition and more concerned that the book fulfilled the author's vision.

What I think is a mistake is to suggest that a freelance editor can guarantee any kind of outcome. I'm always crystal clear about this with my authors who are seeking traditional publication. I've been a literary agent and an acquisitions editor, so I have some insight into the business that can be useful for my authors, but I don't want anyone to ever get the impression that I implied if they hired me they'd get published.

Most authors, whether indie authors or traditionally published (and including us), are never going to have huge amounts of success, if we define success as lots of sales and money coming in. For that reason, I think it's important for them (and for ourselves as writers!) to enjoy the process of writing and revising and to focus on how to be a better writer versus setting goals ("I'm going to get an agent this year!") that depend greatly on

outside influences (luck, timing).

What Do Different Kinds of Editors Do?

In traditional book publishing, the main editorial roles are story/developmental editing (big-picture editing), copyediting (sentence-level editing), and proofreading (making sure egregious errors don't creep in).

Some editors who focus on indie author clients also offer line-editing services, where they help polish authors' prose but do more sentence-level editing than a copy editor typically does. Line editing can also be done at the DE level if the story is in reasonable shape (there's no point in line editing material that's just going to be deleted or rewritten during the revision process).

In traditional publishing, there are a few other roles editors can play. Here's a bit more detail about all of that:

- *The acquisitions/assigning editor (AE)* is the editor who buys the book (or commissions the article/short story), as I described in Chapter Four. This person is responsible for shepherding the book through the publishing process, from contracting with the author, to

overseeing edits, to approving cover design, to helping coordinate publicity. This role is usually (though not always) played by a staffer. An acquisitions editor is sometimes called a senior editor. This is often the person you'll work with as a freelance editor.

- *Executive editors*, *editorial directors*, and *editors-in-chief* oversee the big-picture operations of the editorial side of a publishing company and may also be the ones who contract with you to work on a project—but you're most likely to be working with an acquisitions editor.
- *Editors-at-large* are usually brought on by a publisher because they have a specific skill or reputation to contribute. They rarely deal with day-to-day operations and are usually not on staff. As a freelance editor, you will rarely work with an editor-at-large but you may *be* an editor-at-large.
- *Managing editors* are more likely to be found in periodical publishing than in book publishing, and may perform many of the same roles as the acquisitions editor. In some cases, the managing editor functions more like a copy editor. In book publishing, managing editors

tend to play a role similar to executive editor and may have editors reporting to them. Sometimes they will be more like a production editor. In any case, they will almost always be on staff.

- *A production editor* oversees the actual production of a book or magazine. This editor usually works closely with the managing editor or acquisitions editor to produce the publication or book. Most production editing positions are staff positions, and they require a specific expertise in project management.
- *The developmental editor*, also called content editor, story editor, or substantive editor, is one who works at the big-picture level. Does the manuscript do what it's supposed to do? The developmental editor may also perform basic fact-checking and will be expected to catch discrepancies such as the protagonist who has blue eyes in the first chapter but brown eyes in the second. Developmental editing is often done by an assigning or acquisitions editor, but it can be farmed out to freelancers.
- *A copy editor* is also concerned with whether a piece works, but this is at the

sentence level—polishing the prose. The copy editor also ensures the manuscript conforms to the accepted style. There is a lot of freelance copyediting work available from publishers.

- *The proofreader*, which many people confuse with the copy editor, is the final defense against error in a manuscript. The proofreader goes through a manuscript before it is published to make sure that no errors have slipped through after editing. A proofreader may compare a final typeset work against its copyedited version to make sure the changes were accurately reflected in the final. This work requires an excellent eye for detail. It is also something that many if not most publishers farm out.

Developmental editing, copyediting, and proofreading are the three areas with the most potential for freelancers.

Line editing, which is not a separate editorial round for publishers (it is either folded into development or copyediting) is a very much in-demand service among indie authors.

Blurriness of Editorial Roles

In traditional publishing, work at the concept level is sometimes done before the writing begins, typically with nonfiction but occasionally with fiction, especially when dealing with publisher-owned or licensed intellectual property. This is done by the acquisitions editor, often in consultation with an edit committee (a group of publishing company employees that typically includes the publisher or their designee, other editors, and members of the sales and marketing team, who collectively make decisions about what books to publish).

Each of these levels of editing can have aspects of other levels. If I'm developing a manuscript and I fix some typos, I'm doing a proofreading task. I may also do some sentence-level editing in order to clarify a timeline or fix some other problem, and sentence-level editing is generally considered a copyediting task.

At the copyediting level, an editor may do a heavy copyedit, which will have some elements of development (such as pointing out a timeline problem), a medium copyedit (which may include a lot of line editing), or a light copyedit, which is not unlike proofreading.

A proofreader may on occasion revise or query an ambiguous sentence (which is more a CE role than a PR role).

Editorial Rounds

In other words, these roles can shade into each other even though they are perceived as distinct processes. Note also that each level of editing may incorporate more than one editorial round. So, if I'm developing a project that includes a lot of big-picture problems, I may do two complete rounds—I do a complete edit of the biggest problems, the author makes the necessary revisions, I receive the manuscript back from the author and do a second edit of the less significant problems.

In fiction, this might be a first round edit to deal with plot and conflict and a second round of edits to deal with setting and continuity. In nonfiction, the first round of development might be to address problems with structure and content and the second round might be to deal with fine-tuning the content, making sure unfamiliar terms are defined, and ensuring the overall argument flows logically and smoothly.

The same is true of copyediting; sometimes a manuscript needs more than one round of it. If the CE has had to make a lot of edits, they

will often need to do a second edit once the revision is complete to catch any stray problems remaining. This is sometimes the case with authors who aren't fluent English speakers.

As someone who was trained as an editor in traditional publishing, I always think it's ideal if authors can benefit from all three rounds (DE, CE, PR), as it tends to create a better product. But I'm realistic—I know that most indie authors aren't able to afford all three rounds. A lot of developmental editors address this problem by providing development that includes more line editing than I would typically recommend in order to meet the budget needs of their authors.

If you're developing *and* line editing at the same time, you're not going to suggest big changes like "rewrite the novel in third person." There is too much possibility for error if the author is only going to have this one round of editing and no other editing will take place on the manuscript. This also means the possibility of the author improving the manuscript is limited, which is one reason why I use manuscript evaluation as an alternative to full development.

Manuscript evaluation is using a revision letter to outline the developmental needs of a

manuscript. Since it's less time-consuming than a full developmental edit, I don't have to charge as much for it, and the author can fix the big-picture problems, then spend the rest of their editorial budget on line editing or copyediting.

That said, you can't expect to be a miracle worker. If a manuscript has a lot going wrong with it, there's a limit to what you can do in one round of editing, no matter how skilled you are.

Author's Responsibility

So, part of our work is in setting expectations: one round of editing, no matter how good, will only get the author so far. It might be possible that the author can make improvements by reading about writing, getting beta reads (a beta read is feedback from a reader who has read the full manuscript and reacts to what they've read), and attempting to solve their own writing problems before paying for editing.

No matter whether the client is a publisher or the author, the editorial process should move from the big picture to the sentence level. DE takes place before CE and CE takes place before proofreading. There's no point in copyediting a chapter that might be cut or

completely rewritten during the author's revision process.

What an Edit Includes

In any type of editing, one of the things you're producing is an edited manuscript, including comments (editorial queries) that help guide the author's revision. The exception is proofreading, which typically doesn't include queries unless the proofreader is doing some form of proofediting (which is similar to a very light copyedit).

Typically, you will edit using Microsoft Word, though sometimes proofreading is done on a PDF. While you can start out using Google Documents, eventually you will need to invest in the industry standard, Word.

You typically use "track changes" to show any edits you've made to the actual manuscript (such as to correct a typo). Track changes should always be turned on when you're working with a manuscript. Microsoft has a handy tutorial at support.microsoft.com (search for "track changes").

Then you use the comment function to write editorial queries (which I'll just call "queries" going forward). Queries explain an edit or suggest a revision for the author to make. (Search for "comment function" at the same

link above if you need further technical help.)

For developmental editing, the edit also includes a revision letter (sometimes called an edit letter or editorial letter). The letter highlights your main concerns with the manuscript and advises the author of various ways to fix these problems.

If you're working with a publisher, you may also need to create a CE memo (describing details the copy editor needs to know). You may be asked to perform an evaluation and submit an edit plan before you begin. An edit plan lists the developmental problems you've identified and describes the methods and tools you'll use to solve them ("Manuscript lacks clear action steps in Chapter 3. I'll add clear action steps" or "I'll flag places where the author needs to add clear actions steps," depending on whether you can do the adding or not).

For line editing, some editors include an overview letter describing the overall approach they took to the project, along the lines of, "As we agreed, I focused on livening up the dialogue by reducing small talk, dialogue tags, and overly long speeches. I also addressed unnecessary exposition and eliminated unnecessary repetition."

For copyediting, the edit also includes a

style sheet that describes the style choices made.

For proofreading, the proofread may be done by adding "sticky" notes to a PDF, by sending a table of needed changes to the editor, or using some other process (such as a content management system).

The Number One Rule for Editors

The most important rule for editors: Don't add in errors. A secondary but still crucial rule is to ensure that any editorial suggestions you make are clear, understandable, and *defensible*.

Don't add in errors may sound simple but I would say at least twenty-five percent of the full manuscript edits I see include editorial errors. That is, the editor made a change to the manuscript that created an error. Sometimes the editor has added in a typo. Sometimes the editor has changed correct facts: "She was born in the Welsh marches" to incorrect facts: "She was born in the Welsh marshes" (a march is a borderland, not a wetland). Sometimes the editor has changed correct grammar ("He was lying in wait") to incorrect grammar ("He was laying in wait").

It is one thing to overlook a problem in a manuscript that results in a published error. It's regrettable but it does happen occasionally.

It's another thing to *create* a problem in a manuscript. It's unacceptable, which is why every edit you make must be defensible.

What does defensible mean? It means that you have a good reason (other than personal opinion) for suggesting an edit. In other words, you're not telling an author that she should change the name of her main character to Brutus because you don't like the name Joe. No one cares that you don't like the name Joe.

It's common for newer editors to suggest edits based on what they would have written if they had written the book. That's not defensible.

You must have a specific and logical argument for why an edit is needed. "Joe's motivation isn't believable" is an example of a defensible argument for a developmental editor. If the reader doesn't buy a character's motivation, then the novel doesn't work.

We'll discuss writing effective editorial queries in the next chapter. Following the suggestions there will help ensure that you don't add in errors and that your edits are defensible.

Chapter Ten: How Freelance Editors Work

In this chapter, I'm going to offer a brief overview of the basic tools and methods that freelance editors generally need to use in order to edit effectively.

While the tools I discuss here are easy enough to learn and use, the most important tool you bring to the table is your understanding of how stories work, so if that's not as solid as it could be, I encourage you to focus on that before you get too involved in learning the ins-and-outs of *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

What's Your Style?

The most important tool you'll need as an editor is a set of reference guides. These are books (print or online/ebook) that help you understand how to apply standardization to texts. You've certainly looked up a word in the dictionary before; that's the kind of thing I'm talking about.

The overall guide to how we standardize

texts is called a style guide. Most book publishers follow *The Chicago Manual of Style* (CMOS) and therefore so do we, unless we're asked to follow some other style guide (the Associated Press has one for reporters; the American Medical Association has another).

The style guide is the main place you look to make decisions about how to edit the mechanics of a manuscript (for example, whether to use serial commas).

Occasionally your client will prefer a different approach. For example, I have one client who basically follows CMOS but prefers to use no serial commas. This is called the house style. The house style is almost always a written document, so make sure you ask for one when working for any type of publisher or corporate client. For corporations, this is sometimes called "the brand style." See for example the UCLA brand style guide at brand.ucla.edu

CMOS prefers Merriam-Webster (the most recent edition of the collegiate version—or most clients accept the online version), so that's the dictionary I use.

A usage guide, such as Garner's *Modern American Usage,* offers information on correct usage, including examples of incorrect usage, to help you see where the author you're editing

may be going wrong.

Note that the dictionary reflects current spellings and meanings of words as they are used by people in the real world, so it is what we call a "descriptive" guide. That's why you'll find that "literally" has now taken on the new meaning of "figuratively."

Garner's is a prescriptive text; it tells us how the language should be expressed. Garner would forbid the use of "literally" to mean "figuratively."

So, consider that in a novel, a character who uses "literally" to mean "figuratively" should not be corrected (the character is using the word the way that people do—"He literally destroyed my world"), whereas in a how-to book, using the word "literally" to mean "figuratively" would probably be confusing to readers and should therefore be queried.

This is not to say that you should query every questionable word choice your author makes, just that when you feel the usage is incorrect (and therefore could be confusing to readers) a usage guide helps you ensure that you're making defensible edits, not just getting on a soapbox about your pet peeves.

One of the most valuable uses for Garner (or other usage guides) is to verify the correct expression of phrases. I cannot tell you how

often I encounter incorrect phrases such as "tow the line" for "toe the line" and "in the throws of" for "in the throes of." A quick glance at Garner will verify if an edit is in order.

Following the Author's Preference

When editing directly for fiction authors, I generally recommend following the author's preferences and just making sure those preferences are consistently applied. If an author has a style quirk, such as using spaces around em dashes (per CMOS, em dashes should be closed up) and it's not wrong, just different from what CMOS recommends, I typically let it stand and just be sure that all em dashes are treated the same.

When I'm working for publisher clients, I verify whether this is an acceptable practice for them. It is for most, especially when editing fiction but is less acceptable when editing nonfiction, especially academic works.

When editing a work in a series, whether fiction or nonfiction, editors need to ensure consistency across the series as well as within the current manuscript itself, so you will need to look at what previous editorial decisions have been made. Editing a book in a series is often guided by a series bible, which is

basically the house style for a particular series of books.

Sensitivity Reading

Encountering sexist, racist, or otherwise problematic language and attitudes is a fairly common problem that crops up in editing. We have to find ways to address it without accusing the author of being racist, sexist, and so on. People get very defensive about those terms and will have trouble listening to your concerns if they feel they're being unfairly attacked. I like to use proxies for this discussion, as this removes the blame from author and editor: "Readers may find . . . ."

When dealing with fiction, sometimes characters are actually intended to be sexist or racist—that's part of who they are/the story. We aren't in the business of saying authors can't write such characters or address such issues in their work. I do question whether a sexist/racist/etc. comment is necessary at all if it doesn't seem to serve the larger story and seems gratuitous but other than that authors are free to write whatever they want to write. (And I'm just as free to refuse to edit it.)

Occasionally an author will unintentionally have a character present some of this thinking without that character otherwise being

portrayed as sexist/racist.

In those cases, I will point out the discrepancy is inconsistent with the character and "could be taken as sexist/racist by some readers. Consider conveying his qualities using less loaded language, such as . . . ."

Some authors just don't realize that over time, the connotations of various words change and that some words become identified as problematic. Or they fall into old habits of thinking that they don't really intend to be offensive. For these reasons, clear but diplomatic queries will almost always solve the problem.

In manuscripts where disability, mental health problems, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity are involved, sometimes an author can, even with good intentions, imagination, and compassion, misunderstand and misrepresent what these life experiences are like.

Editors who have personal experience in these areas can serve as sensitivity/ authenticity readers to help authors avoid making big mistakes.

The challenge is that one person's experience is not every person's experience, so ideally an author isn't just asking one person for an opinion (although that can be a good

start). It's best if the author immerses themselves in a milieu, particularly when writing about something they haven't been through personally.

And, of course, even if an author has been through something personally, they can have the "one person's experience is not every person's experience" problem. For example, I once encountered a sweeping generalization from an author with an autistic son. It said something along the lines of, "After their autistic son was born, his wife wanted to ignore him and move on to the next child, the way mothers do."

Um, what? Maybe that was what this author's wife did, but that is not necessarily true of every mother of an autistic child. In this case, making this "ignore him and move on" instinct an individual characteristic of the wife in the story would work better than allowing it to remain as a damaging stereotype. It would also serve to actually *characterize* the character. We would learn something about her from it.

Related to the above example is the author who seems to think that because something happened to them (and is therefore factual) they don't have to make it seem realistic or true to the story. But the rules of storytelling aren't suspended just because something once

happened in real life.

By the same token, authors will think because something *didn't* happen to them, it doesn't happen to anyone, an equally problematic perspective. In other words, just because one woman didn't experience sexism in her job at a tech company doesn't mean no one does. Diplomatically providing resources for the author can help raise awareness.

Recommending the use of authenticity/sensitivity readers is something you can do if you think the author could benefit from guidance that you may not be in the best position to give.

Sexualization of Minors

Specifically regarding the sexualization of minors, which occasionally crops up when editing manuscripts with sexual/romantic elements, obviously there is a difference between a YA romance between two seventeen-year-olds and, say, a certain infamous novel about the sexual relationship between a thirteen-year-old gymnast and her thirty-something coach (especially horrific in light of the stories of sexual abuse of young athletes that are emerging).

Some writers don't seem to understand this difference, however. Here again, neutrally

stating the problem from the readers' perspective ("readers are likely to find this relationship abusive, not romantic") is typically going to be more effective than dramatic denunciations of the author.

Explicitly describing the sexual activity of minors is actually against the terms of service for many publishing platforms, such as Kindle — something authors may not be aware of.

Also, related: I have no problem refusing to work on manuscripts that are offensive to me for any reason whatsoever. You can absolutely draw your line in the sand wherever you like, and you can communicate this information on your website, through communications with potential clients, and so on.

It's important to at least briefly review a manuscript before you agree to edit it, not just because you need to have an idea of how challenging it will be to edit (in order to charge an appropriate fee) but to recognize if there are themes or plot events that you don't wish to edit. If you have any specific triggers, it is absolutely A-OK to ask the author about them before reviewing the ms (for example, "Are there are any depictions of TRIGGER(S) in your manuscript?")

I don't edit anything with gratuitous

and/or graphic violence or misogyny of any kind. You can set your own rules.

Fact-Checking

Another important issue to work out with the client is the matter of fact-checking. Fact-checking is verifying that the information included in a manuscript is accurate: World War I took place in the early twentieth century, production of Hummers stopped in 2010. An author who gets facts wrong—whether in fiction or nonfiction—irritates and alienates readers, so one of our goals in both developmental editing and copyediting is to ensure that basic facts are accurate.

For the most part, we'll just use our common sense: if a fact as presented in the manuscript doesn't square with what we know of reality, we'll double-check it. For example, if we're reading a thriller about a driver racing down I-70 through Colorado, and the speed limit is posted as 75 kilometers per hour, well, we would flag that since all posted speed limits in Colorado are in miles. Unless we're reading an alternate history novel in which the French prevailed during the French and Indian War.

In copyediting specifically, we'll go further than that to double-check whatever facts that are presented in the manuscript: "It's four

hundred miles from Tulsa to Oklahoma City" and "Harvard University was founded in 1843."

However, an author should not expect you to be a subject-matter expert (unless you *are* a subject-matter expert and you've agreed to take on this fact-checking burden). That is, you'd be expected to note that the Battle of Legnica took place in April, 1241, not 1421 (because you can find that out with a Google search) but you couldn't be expected to know, or easily find out, the intricacies of Mongol foreign policy during this period. That's up to the author.

When fact-checking, you'll need to set limits on your own behavior—spending two minutes to confirm a fact versus going down a rabbit hole of research for three hours.

Some manuscripts have a higher likelihood of factual error—historical novels, for example, will have many details that could be wrong as compared to a novel set in the present day (presuming the author at least looks out the window on occasion). But even when we're editing contemporary novels, we need to do a certain amount of fact-checking so that inaccuracies don't make it into print.

Our authors rely on us to help make sure they aren't making mistakes. For the most part

this just means using our general knowledge to alert us when something seems unlikely. It doesn't mean that we suddenly have to become experts on shipbuilding just because the manuscript we're currently working on features a shipbuilding protagonist.

You may feel that setting a rule of doing no fact-checking at all helps solve the problem but that's evading one of your responsibilities as an editor. It's quite common for authors to predicate plot events on things that could never happen, at least not how they describe them. (Throwing an iPhone away doesn't magically end Apple's ability to produce a call history, to take a recent example I encountered.) Some fact-checking is required for you to address such implausibilities effectively, and flagging implausibilities is a responsibility in both developmental and copyediting (and to some degree in line editing).

Fact-checking can be a time sink, so we have to manage our time wisely. But we also can't just be lazy and say, "This doesn't seem right; please double-check." Nothing annoys an author more than to be asked to check something they know is accurate! We have to give a specific, defensible reason why we think the author is in error, and usually that requires

a little research. So, that is a time commitment we have to factor into the fee we ask for any project. The real skill is in being able to get the answer you need quickly and move on.

Sometimes we make fact-checking more complicated than it is. For example, suppose you're editing a manuscript set in the early Middle Ages that references Vikings in Dublin and you wonder whether there really were Vikings in Dublin at that time. You don't have to research the history of Vikings to verify whether Vikings were in Dublin in this time period. A quick Google search of the term "Vikings in Dublin" tells us there was a Viking settlement there in the ninth century and that "Dubh Linn" was first documented in the eighth and ninth centuries. No further investigation is needed to accept that the story's protagonist could have hired Viking mercenaries in Dublin.

In some types of historical novels, strict accuracy is not that important as long as what happens seems like the kind of thing that *could* happen. For example, a colleague of mine writes historical romance, and in her opinion, as long as the romance is well-written, readers will forgive some stumbles in accuracy as long as there aren't glaring anachronisms. But that is by no means universally true. For this

reason, some historical writers want to work with editors who can help backstop them—they want editors who have significant familiarity with the time period to help them catch errors they have inadvertently overlooked.

A related consideration is, "Should an editor point out anachronistic phrases and idioms?"

Historical novels aren't written in the language of the period in which they're set, so there will always be some anachronistic word usage no matter what. The English that would have been spoken in, say, the Middle Ages would have been a form of Old or Middle English. In any case, probably half of the words used in the manuscript (if not more) would not have been used at the time. We certainly aren't going to expect readers to follow along with an historical novel written in Old or Middle English.

So what we want to do is note word choice that jars the reader—that not only is modern but *sounds* modern. This is true even if the word actually existed during the time period in question.

In some instances, readers will accept a modern-sounding historical novel as long as that is the style of the novel as a whole. Or they

will accept an "old" sounding historical novel as long as that is the style of the novel as a whole. What they won't accept is a pastiche—some modern phrasing mixed in with archaic/old phrasings (unless the author is aiming for comic effect).

Another concern is to be aware of anachronistic concepts—ideas that people in the time and culture would be unlikely to have. Notions of privacy, individual rights, family obligations, and more vary widely. A character in sixteenth-century China should not be indistinguishable from a twenty-first-century American.

Basics of Editorial Queries

Editorial queries (our feedback addressing specific issues in the manuscript on the manuscript itself) are made using the comment function in Word. Here's an example of what that looks like:
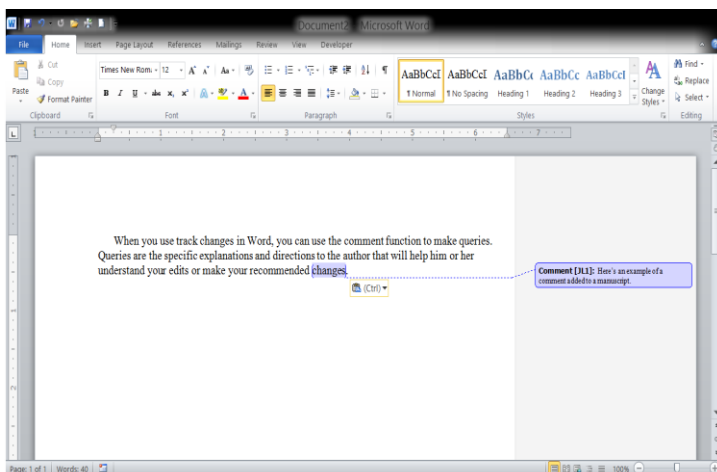
When you make an editorial query, you're doing it for one of two reasons:

#1: to explain an edit you've made

or

#2: to suggest the author make a change

Whenever you write a query it must be clear whether you're making a #1 query or a #2 query. If you've rewritten a sentence because it was hopelessly tangled up, you would use a #1 query and say: "AU: Sentence edited to avoid confusion. Edit OK?"

You always add the "Edit OK?" when you've made a change on the manuscript because it's the author's work and ultimate

decision, not yours, and you want to make it clear that you understand this distinction. You also want to make sure the author realizes you've actually made a change (or changes) to the manuscript and you want them to review the change(s) in case you've inadvertently altered the meaning or caused some other error.

When you want to suggest that the author make a revision, but you haven't actually made a change in the manuscript, then you're using a #2 query. In that case, you don't use the "Edit OK?" wording, you just make the suggestion. For example: "AU: This paragraph uses the word 'trivial' five times, which readers may consider repetitious. Consider revising."

This way, it's clear what the problem is and equally clear that you're leaving it up to the author to fix it.

Use Praise Queries, Not Reaction Queries

Occasionally you can, and should, use a third kind of query, which I call a praise query. Basically this is a reaction query that says anything along the lines of, "You did a great job with this scene!" Nothing motivates an author more than seeing that a reader is connecting with their work. If they feel that all

you do is criticize, they're likely to be discouraged. So, add a few praise queries when you authentically can. (This is more important for developmental editors and line editors than for copy editors.)

However, other than obvious praise, I advise against reaction queries that just say what you observe without offering guidance. For example: "AU: Gregory is coming across as mean-spirited here."

This type of query/commentary may be fine or even encouraged when in a writing group or critiquing a peer, but as an editor, you need to provide your author with more guidance than that. Okay, Gregory is coming across as mean-spirited. So what?

Try something like: "AU: Gregory is coming across as mean-spirited rather than frustrated. Instead of having him pull a cruel prank on his best friend, consider having the two get into an argument at school."

State Queries Neutrally

Your queries should never be snide or unkind: "AU: This is the dumbest description I've ever read" and "AU: I'd suggest learning to spell before calling yourself a writer" are examples of what not to do.

Any kind of humor in queries (or, indeed,

the revision letter, style sheet, or any other communication) can be taken the wrong way. Some authors may have enough distance from their work to laugh along with you but many do not. You probably wouldn't want your boss or colleagues snarking about work you've put your heart and soul into. Same thing here. Authors put a lot of trust in us. Don't give them any reason to regret it.

In editing, the only thing we ever poke fun at is ourselves.

Chapter Eleven: Developmental Editing

I want to turn my attention to describing in a bit more detail what you can expect to do for each different type of editing. You will almost certainly find that one type of editing appeals to you more than the others.

Let me stress that most freelance editors don't do all four types of editing I'll be describing in these next chapters (developmental editing, copyediting, line editing, and proofreading). It is difficult to become expert at each of them, though over the course of a long career, it's certainly possible.

For the most part, you're likely to do better to establish yourself as a developmental editor or a copy editor, not as someone who can develop *and* line edit *and* copyedit *and* proofread. (And definitely not all on the same manuscript! If a client is paying for separate editorial rounds, they should pay separate editors for them; the more familiar you become with a manuscript, the less likely you are to be able to spot errors in it.)

It's common for people to do developmental editing and line editing, *or* line editing and copyediting, *or* copyediting and proofreading since there is some flow between these editorial roles and functions.

But I recommend beginning with one type of editing, learning the skill, then practicing the skill for a while (at least a year or two) before moving on to the next one.

This also helps with your learning; it is very difficult to practice the big-picture thinking you need to do well at development when you're also trying to learn the sentence-level particulars of copyediting.

What Developmental Editing Covers

Developmental editing, sometimes called story, substantive, structural, or content editing, isn't focused on whether the author has put the commas in the right place. It's about the bigger picture.

Fiction Particulars

For fiction, a developmental editor asks:

1. Is this a type of genre fiction? If so, does it conform to genre requirements/ expectations? If it is genre fiction but does not conform to expectations, is the

nonconformity a lack of understanding of the genre and the audience, or a deliberate literary effort designed to transform the genre? If the latter, is it effective?

2. Are there any holes in this piece? For fiction, that would be anything from a missing piece of the plot to lack of character development.

3. Are the characters' motivations clear and understandable? Are characters consistent in their actions? (If a character wouldn't steal a quart of milk in Chapter One, but he does in Chapter Five, have convincing changes occurred that would make this action believable?)

4. Is the core conflict compelling? (All fiction is, at heart, about conflict.) Or is it the kind of conflict that could be resolved if one character said to another, "You know, I have an evil twin"?

5. Is the setting effectively conveyed? Here we need to be concerned with more than just visual description. Are there sounds and smells? If it's summer on page eleven and winter on page twelve, is this discrepancy

explained?

6. Does the overall pacing work? For example, if the story is a thriller, is it a fast-paced page-turner?
7. Is the point-of-view consistent throughout? For example, if the piece is written in first person, does it include only information that that character could know?
8. Does the author provide sufficient backstory to explain the characters' actions without resorting to info-dumping?
9. Does the narrative arc reach a satisfying conclusion?
10. Overall, does the piece work for its intended audience?

Nonfiction Particulars

For nonfiction, a developmental editor asks:

1. What is the purpose of this piece? Does it achieve its purpose? If you can't tell what the piece is supposed to do, that's a problem. If some of the information contradicts the purpose, that will need to be reconciled.
2. Are there any holes in this piece? For example, does the author fail to create

logical connections between ideas? Does the author rely too heavily on assumptions that are not stated or are unclear?

3. Is the piece structured effectively so that ideas build on each other?
4. Does the piece include too few (or too many) examples and illustrations? We often need to ask for examples and case histories to illustrate points the author is making.
5. Are claims and assertions supported with research, studies, or other evidence?
6. Are complexities defined appropriately for the audience?
7. Has the author's message been effectively conveyed?
8. Overall, does the piece work for its intended audience?

For All Development

In addition to these main issues, developmental editors look specifically for:

- Material being promised but not delivered. For example, the introduction to an article may promise simple ways to save money this month, but the piece includes complicated, time-consuming

processes. Or a novel starts with a thrilling opening chapter that promises adventure and hijinks and then settles into a cozy, domestic mystery.

- Titles and headings don't match content. A piece I once worked on was called "Meditation for Beginners" but included only information on yoga. Yoga can be part of a meditative process but yoga =/= meditation.

- Chapters or sections are too long or too short, have too few headings or too many. In fiction, a chapter that is broken into ten one-page scenes needs attention to create a more immersive, integrated reading experience; in nonfiction, a chapter with ten headings per page is probably lacking content or organization (or the author has unnecessarily labeled the content).

- Material that is in an appendix/footnote but should be in the book/article or vice versa or is missing. For example, definitions readers need to have to understand concepts being presented should be in the text, not in a footnote. (Though it would also be a good practice to include a glossary as well.) For fiction, this might be something like a lack of

setting that makes it difficult for readers to visualize the location. Or, a novel with unfamiliar or made-up words that might benefit from an author's note regarding how to pronounce and understand them.

Those are the basics of what we're looking for in a DE. But each type of writing you edit requires some specific considerations. An article is edited differently from a book; an essay is edited differently from an article; an informative nonfiction book (such as self-help or how-to) is edited differently from a creative nonfiction book (like a memoir) or a novel. (Novels and creative nonfiction are edited in a similar way.)

By the same token, editing for a company (such as a publishing company) is different from editing for individual clients.

What does this mean? Let me give an example:

The apartment building in the middle of Mentone Avenue was in the late stages of dilapidation. As I rounded the corner from Venice Boulevard, I saw what Margaret St. James had meant about squalor amidst jewels: the two buildings on

each side were new construction, gleaming bright and clean in the sunshine, but 5704 squatted between them like a gargoyle, paint peeling, concrete stairs crumbling, the front door showing every sign of having been kicked in more than once.

Now, if this were a nonfiction article, perhaps by a travel writer, an editor would want the writer to provide the context more immediately. The editor would ask, which city are we talking about? Why is the house important? And who is Margaret St. James?

A novel editor, knowing that there is time and space for all of that, would probably have no remarks. Novels are read by people who don't have to know the answer to everything right this minute; articles are read by people who need to know everything NOW. (Sometimes these are all the same readers; they just have different expectations depending on what they're reading.)

The Process of Developmental Editing

While different editors develop different processes for conducting the edit, typically the process includes several passes.

Here's my process for developmental editing:

Step One

I always read the manuscript in full before I try to begin an edit. As I read the full manuscript, I make notes for myself about areas where I'm confused, where something doesn't seem plausible, where I'm getting bogged down in info-dumping, etc. That's to help capture my first reaction to the story. These reactions are not meant for the author, they're for me, though these notes do form the draft of my revision letter.

Step Two

Then I do my main developmental pass where I begin writing big-picture queries. Perhaps in that first read-through I didn't understand Gerry's motivation for firing Harold in Chapter Two but found it in Chapter Ten. If that works, great! If it doesn't, then I will place a query in Chapter Two, saying that the author needs to move the motivation from Chapter Ten to Chapter Two.

Then I will place a query in Chapter Ten, saying that the motivation needs to be moved to Chapter Two. These queries mutually reinforce each other and help the author know

exactly what to do during the revision process. The author has enough information to implement my suggested change, moving the necessary information to the right place and deleting it from the wrong place. Once I've done that, I'll move on to addressing the next thing, such as "Esmerelda's character arc needs work."

For nonfiction, I do more actual meddling with the text as authors and publishers tend to prefer this approach. They are typically trying to communicate information and aren't wedded to the way they've said it or arranged it, unlike novelists, who would find my rearranging the first four chapters of their novel overstepping my role.

For nonfiction, if I think that a paragraph defining a concept in Chapter Three should go in Chapter Two where the concept is first introduced, I'll typically move it myself and use a query to explain to the author why I made that edit. This is a #1 query (explaining an edit you've made) so I'll add "Edit OK?" to the query.

If I'm not able to make the revision myself, I'll write a #2 query (suggesting a change for the author to make), often something along the lines of, "Please provide a definition of this concept here" or "I recommend adding an

example of how this process can be used by readers in their daily lives."

I try to make sure these queries always contain all three components of an effective editorial query (see the section "The Three-Part Editorial Query" below)

Once I've finished this pass, I write the revision letter, indicating the main issues I feel the author should address in their revision. The revision letter and the manuscript edits and queries all work together to help the author do a successful revision.

Step Three

Once I've finished this main editorial pass, I set the manuscript aside for a day or two. Before delivering my edit, I review all of my edits and queries on the manuscript so that I can see if I've dropped a thread somewhere. I also double-check to be sure I need all of the queries I've written (overwhelming the author with a lot of nitpicky suggestions is counterproductive).

And I make sure that all of the queries are diplomatically stated. Sometimes after you've identified the same problem seven hundred times, you get a little impatient and it can show up in your queries. This final review pass helps to catch them.

Then I review my revision letter to make sure that everything I've said and recommended is clearly stated. I double-check to be sure that it works with the manuscript edit itself. After reading the revision letter, the author shouldn't have any surprises when they read the manuscript edit. And, again, I make sure that my language is diplomatic but clear.

The Three-Part Query Template

Every developmental query should have three parts: the what, the why, and the how:

1. Identify *what* the developmental problem is
2. Explain *why* it's a problem for this manuscript (not just in a generic sense)
3. Describe *how* the author could solve the problem

All three aspects are important, not only because the author needs to know these three elements (although the author does). You, the editor, do, too. By investigating the developmental problem deeply enough to be able to name it, explain why it's a problem, and propose a solution, you'll have gone beyond a superficial read and into the realm of true

development.

This investigation turns a critique into a developmental edit. You can *start* with a question like "Why does Mary act that way?" But just asking that question is not an effective editorial query. You need to go deeper. If you analyze the situation further, you might be able to say, "Okay, the question 'Why does Mary act that way?' means I don't understand her motivation. So, the developmental problem has to do with character development. This would need to be fixed because readers will lose interest in a character they don't understand. The way to fix it would be to make Mary's motivation clearer."

Voila! *Now* you're doing developmental editing.

Revision Letter

If you're interested in doing development for any kind of client, writing a revision letter is part of the edit. Here's a template you can use to write your own:

Dear AUTHOR:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to work on *TITLE*. I enjoyed . . . .[*Begin with praise about*

the novel. State something specific that the author does well. Don't just say, "I really enjoyed this manuscript but noticed some problems." The author needs to know what's going right as well as what's going wrong.]

That said, I did find a few areas that need a bit of attention. These include DEVELOPMENTAL PROBLEM 1, PROBLEM 2, and PROBLEM 3. [*Name the overall developmental problems. Choose no more than three to five of the most important. Otherwise you'll risk overwhelming the author, resulting in a poorly executed revision. Then describe in turn how each developmental problem affects the ms. Remember to use the three-part query template: 1. state what the problem is; 2. explain why it's a problem for this ms; and 3. offer a possible solution.*]
I'll dig into each of these further in this letter.

DEVELOPMENTAL PROBLEM 1
   (details, details, details)

DEVELOPMENTAL PROBLEM 2

(details, details, details)

DEVELOPMENTAL PROBLEM 3
(details, details, details)

[*For shorter letters, you don't necessarily need headers to guide the author through the letter but if your letter is longer, these can be helpful. In any event, if possible, show how developmental problems are related to each other: "Because of DEVELOPMENTAL PROBLEM 1, there is DEVELOPMENTAL PROBLEM 2." Inconsistent characters create implausible plots. Lack of clear motivation creates unclear conflict and characters that seem to act out of character. Etc.*]

. . . By addressing these issues, your ms will be much stronger and more emotionally engaging to readers.

I did catch a few typos and have called out one or two awkwardly stated areas but . . . .[*"but be sure to have a copy editor look over the final manuscript before publication" or whatever the author's next step should*

be. It's rare for a developmental round to touch on copyediting concerns (things like word choice or typos). Unless the manuscript you're editing has no developmental issues, your revision letter should focus on the DE problems, not the CE problems. You can mention if there are issues that will need to be addressed at a later time.]

As we discussed, the next step is to . . . .[*state what the author needs to do next and how, such as consider making the required revisions and letting you know if they have any questions; then state what the author needs to do once the revision is accomplished — send it back to you for a review, send it on to the copy editor, whatever. Include any relevant dates or instructions needed.*]

I am going to miss spending time with your characters! [*Say something nice about the manuscript to close*].

Sincerely,
EDITOR

Developmental Editing v. Critique/Beta Read

Newer editors sometimes confuse developmental editing with critique or other forms of offering feedback to authors.

A critique is simply a reader reaction. The reader says how they have experienced the manuscript and leaves it up to the author to decide what, if anything, to do about it. Obviously, a critique could be more than that/different from that, but it's the basic process most follow when critiquing peer-to-peer.

In practice, we often hear this kind of critique called a "beta read." Someone who isn't the author reads the book and reports on problems they encountered and questions they had.

In the DE model, we position ourselves as authorities on writing and editing matters. That's not to say that we're "right" or that we can insist that the author make certain changes. It does mean that we're making an argument for the editorial vision we have for the work. That's a much different intention than a critique. We may share personal opinions, but we will also know what is generally expected of a certain type of novel or work of nonfiction, and we'll typically offer solutions to

developmental problems based on what we know about how such books work (or should work).

It's common for newer developmental editors to focus on critiquing rather than editing an author's work. Developmental editing does contain elements of critique but it is more than that.

To do a good developmental edit, I have to immerse myself in the project world, to try to understand what it is and what it's trying to be. I'm not just saying, "I was confused here." That is critique, not editing. Many developmental editors say that what they do is development when it is actually critique.

In a developmental edit, what I am trying to do is *guide an author in implementing the strategies that will help their manuscript meet their audience's needs.*

This is a complex undertaking and is far more than the reader reaction that some editors make it out to be. While reader reaction is immensely valuable for the writer seeking it as well as for an aspiring editor trying to hone their skills, it is not developmental editing.

Developmental Editing v. Coaching

A developmental edit is a finite act concentrated on evaluating a completed

manuscript, making manuscript edits and queries, and recommending revisions for the author to make.

Coaching is whatever else you might do to help a writer grow in craft that isn't that finite act of editing. It might be brainstorming elements of a book proposal, helping an author solve a specific problem in their manuscript, offering writing prompts to stretch writerly muscles.

Developmental Editing v. Book Doctoring

Book doctoring goes far beyond developmental editing into rewriting large chunks of the manuscript. As a book doctor, you may work with a developmental or acquisitions editor who defines the problems to be solved, but in other instances you may be the one both identifying the problems and fixing them. In book doctoring, you are taking over the author's revision role.

In editing short nonfiction (such as articles and blog posts) the developmental editor sometimes takes on what would be the equivalent of a book doctor role in order to ensure the manuscript meets the audience's needs. This is especially common if you are editing for a publication that solicits written

content from people who are not writers, such as a trade publication that does not pay contributors. In those cases, it will be easier for you to fix the submission than to kick it back to the author with your requirements for the revision.

Developmental Editing v. Ghostwriting and Coauthoring

A ghostwriter is someone who writes a book or article (or blog post, etc.) for another person, who publishes it under their name. This is common in fields like celebrity memoir. The ghostwriter is uncredited (their name does not appear on the cover or anywhere else).

A coauthor is someone who writes a book (or article, etc.) with someone else. Usually coauthor pairs include an expert and a writer, but they can be two experts, if both experts are competent writers. In most coauthoring situations a developmental editor takes on, the developmental editor is the writing expert and the other author is a subject-matter expert. In this case, coauthoring can be very similar to ghostwriting, except that your name will go on the cover/in the byline.

A developmental editor typically does not engage in the act of writing, significant rewriting, or inventing.

As you can see, it's easy for a developmental editor to also do some of these other types of editorial work.

Getting Developmental Editing Experience

Two ways newer editors get experience with developmental editing/story editing is through beta reading and critique partnering. Beta reading is giving a basic reader reaction to someone's manuscript. Critique partners are writers who trade their manuscripts and give each other feedback.

Above, I described how these services are different from developmental editing, but they can be very helpful experiences for aspiring developmental editors. If you enjoy doing and sharing your critique, then you will probably enjoy doing developmental editing. If you struggle with getting through a poorly written manuscript, developmental editing might not be for you.

Here are some basic rules to follow when beta reading and critique partnering:

1. All feedback should be constructive and diplomatic. If a manuscript makes you want to fling your laptop against the wall, just say, "This is not for me" and go

on with life rather than trying to tell the author all of the ways in which they are a terrible writer. That does not mean you can't tell an author that you find a character to be, say, stereotypical, or that you must never point out that acres of boring description have made your eyes glaze over. It does mean that you need to do this in a polite and productive way ("Here is where I lost interest" versus "You call yourself a writer? Really?").

2. Ideally, critiques and beta reads are about reader reaction. We're not trying to solve the author's problems for them. This is a significant difference from developmental editing, but it is the best way to ensure that you're not overstepping the role. Relate *your* reactions, and only your reactions ("I was confused by this scene"). Let the author figure it out from there (or suggest they hire a developmental editor!)

3. Critique partners (CPs) typically work in the same or related genres and trade manuscripts, so it helps if they are in similar places with their manuscripts before they begin a CP relationship — that is, they've both completed their drafts

and have made revisions that they recognize are needed. If the relationship lasts then of course "I owe you one" can be trusted but in the beginning, it is best not to seek or offer critique partnering unless both parties have manuscripts ready for critique.

4. Make your expectations of your CP relationship clear. How will you each deliver your feedback? Will you each write a two-to-three page critique? Hop on a call? Return a marked-up manuscript? Any or all of these approaches can work fine, but make sure you agree on the procedure before going forward.

5. Offering to do a beta read does not imply that the person you are beta reading for owes you a beta read; that's a critique partner. But reciprocity means a lot in the writing/editing community, so don't be a taker.

6. To perform a beta read or a critique, adhere to the following suggestions:

   a. Set expectations. How long will it take you to do the beta read? How will you deliver your feedback? (See #4 above.)

   b. Remember, "Seeking critique

partner" implies that you will exchange manuscripts with the other writer, whereas "seeking/offering beta reads" does not.

c. Before offering your reader response, read the full manuscript! No matter how tempted, don't offer a preliminary reaction ("I've only read the first chapter but it's really good so far!"). Sometimes the first couple of chapters can be amazing, and then the manuscript falls apart. Other times the first three chapters are painfully dull but the rest of the manuscript is engaging. You don't know until you know.

d. Offer specific information about your reader experience: what parts are effective, where did you lose interest, what confused you, what did you like, what didn't you like? Refrain from offering advice on how to fix the problem. Focus on conveying your experience as a reader.

Another way to get experience in developing your developmental eye is to be a

contest judge. Often, writers' organizations will offer contests for members (and others) to enter, and they need volunteers to read the submissions and decide which ones deserve to win. You'll usually be supplied a checklist of what to look for (particularly for genre fiction) and you may meet in a committee to hammer out final decisions. This is a great way to try to defend your editorial decisions and to learn from others.

Chapter Twelve: Copyediting

Copyediting is sentence-level editing that has the primary goal of ensuring accuracy and consistency across a manuscript. For example, if a character is named Megan but sometimes her name is spelled Meghan, you'd correct the misspellings. If an author places Manhattan in New Jersey, you'd flag it.

This type of editing is ideal for those eagle-eyed people who notice typos and other mistakes in published work and who already have a solid grasp of the principles of grammar and usage (the real ones, not the ones your elementary school English teacher taught you). If you've got a good memory and pay attention to detail, this could be the right type of editing for you.

Copyediting has two significant advantages over developmental and line editing:

- it's faster to learn
- it's easier to get this kind of work as a freelancer

There's a lot of demand for freelance copy editors among publishers (as well as indie author clients), and it's fairly easy for them to determine if you have the skills: you take a copyediting test and you either pass or fail. (Indie authors don't usually administer CE tests but publishers do).

Basic Knowledge and Skills for Copy Editors

To do this type of work, as I mentioned above, you need to have a solid understanding of grammar and usage and can spot and explain what a pronoun-antecedent agreement error is. (You must also be A-OK with the pronoun "they" being used to refer to the singular.)

As I mentioned earlier, tools you'll need as an editor, and particularly a copy editor, are reference guides. You will have to become very familiar with how *The Chicago Manual of Style* treats common mechanical issues. References to CMOS are always to the chapter and section ("CMOS 3.1"), not to the page number.

You'll also want Amy J. Schneider's *The Chicago Guide to Copyediting Fiction*, as this provides some great information (especially about style sheets).

For example, CMOS (as we call it

affectionately) recommends closing up em dashes so that they look like—this—but some authors use open em dashes that look like — this — which means that if you're using CMOS you'd need to close up all those open em dashes.

CMOS also recommends the use of the Oxford (or serial) comma. That means using a comma before "or" or "and" in a series: Learning copyediting is fun, educational, and rewarding.

Plenty of authors leave off the Oxford comma and for them copyediting is fun, educational and rewarding.

As a CE using CMOS, you'd add that serial comma in.

As I mentioned before, you'll also use Merriam-Webster's dictionary and a usage guide like Garner's. Note that a dictionary is a descriptive usage guide. That means it simply describes the language as it is currently used. A descriptive guide reflects everyday practices of broad communities of English speakers/writers. That's why you'll find ain't in the dictionary, even though you wouldn't (or shouldn't) find it in a piece of formal academic writing. A usage guide like Garner's is a prescriptive guide; that is, it shows how language *should* be used (according to experts,

not users).

If you're working with indie author clients, then you can say that these are the resources you'll be using and most will be fine with that.

Publishers, as I mentioned, will typically use these resources but they probably also have a house style as I described earlier.

However, I want to make one caveat: in copyediting fiction, we are less strict about adhering to style guides and more fluid with following the author's preference. We still want to make sure all the words are spelled correctly, and we still want to ensure consistency, but if the author tends to use open em dashes, we will just ensure that all em dashes are open instead of closing them all up. We wouldn't try to "correct" a character's dialogue if they use constructions like "gonna" or incomplete sentences: "You lying, thieving skunk!"

Similarly, if an author uses few commas (common in thrillers and other fast-paced fiction) we wouldn't add them all back in again. We would concern ourselves with spotting the instances where the lack of punctuation could cause confusion.

Finally, all of these resources are American. They are used to edit American English manuscripts intended for readers of American

English. There are numerous dialects of English for which you would need to use different resources and apply different standards. A simple example is that Americans spell the word "color" one way and the British spell it another ("colour"). Unless you're being asked to Americanize the English, you must respect different standards. In general, I would not try to copyedit more than one type of English, especially when you're first learning the ropes.

Levels of Copyediting

A copy editor isn't a developmental editor. You're not trying to show the author how to restructure their novel more effectively or recommend they include more case studies in their business book.

Sometimes you'll be asked to work on a project in dire need of big-picture attention before anyone worries about the punctuation. This is especially true when you're working with indie authors who may not know how much work a given manuscript truly needs. You need to be able to point out when a specific manuscript needs a developmental edit before it can be copyedited.

That said, sometimes a separate development round isn't possible (maybe the

author has a budget constraint or the publisher has a deadline looming). In that case, you may need to do a copyedit that addresses the most pressing of the development issues ("the plot is so convoluted I don't know why Gerald was hauled off in handcuffs") while also correcting grammar and usage errors.

Thus, copy editors sometimes offer different "levels" of copyediting: light, medium, and heavy.

Light Copyedit

You correct the egregious errors, hunt out redundancies like "the the" appearing in a sentence, make sure the manuscript adheres to the agreed-upon style, and ensure it doesn't have any jarring continuity or factual errors.

This is often the type of CE done after a manuscript has already been developed. And it's generally the preferred approach for publishing companies and book packagers.

Medium Copyedit

In a medium copyedit, you do all of the correction and style adjustments involved in a light copy edit plus more line editing. You will suggest changes to sentences that aren't incorrect in the sense of having a typo but which could be more polished with some

attention.

This can be a good choice for an author who doesn't have a lot of big-picture problems but needs a little help elevating the level of the prose. This type of copyedit helps fine-tune the author's language. Many indie authors prefer this type of copyedit and sometimes call it a line edit. But it differs from a line edit in that it is also concerned with catching stray commas, ensuring consistency across the manuscript, and so on.

Heavy Copyedit

A heavy copyedit can verge on a developmental edit and can focus more on big-picture items like characterization and motivation.

For fiction, a heavy copyedit is generally one where the editor does a lot of rewriting rather than suggesting rewrites to the author. For example, if the manuscript is full of head-hopping and you're going to fix all of that as the CE, it would be a heavy copyedit. You have to be sure the author is okay with intensive meddling like this before you do it. (I recommend showing the author a sample before going very far with the edit.)

For nonfiction, a heavy copyedit might include moving information around, adding

necessary information (of the type that can be supplied by a quick Google search, such as the definition of a particular term used in the manuscripts), and deleting large sections of unnecessary material.

Determine Copyediting Level Ahead of Time

Always be certain the author understands the level of editing you'll be undertaking; novelists in particular will often balk if you rewrite their sentences—but sometimes they *want* you to do the work.

On the other hand, for nonfiction we typically just make the needed changes and only ask the author to supply information or make revisions that we don't have the requisite knowledge to do.

Agree ahead of time on your approach. I recommend editing a few pages first and getting the author's feedback before continuing to ensure that everyone's expectations are being met. Be sure to build time for this into your schedule and your agreement with the author.

Basic Method for Copyediting

I highly recommend that you cultivate the sense of humor of a twelve-year-old child: you

need to be able to catch unintentional innuendoes and double meanings.

For example: "I love sausage." Such a seemingly innocent phrase. But you need to flag that.

Before you begin your edit, save a copy of the manuscript under a file name like "TITLE-AUTHOR-ORIGINAL." Then save the copy you're working on under a name like "TITLE-AUTHOR-EDITED." Do all of your work on this latter manuscript. In case of a problem (you accidentally deleted a chapter) you can easily go back to the original and copy-and-paste.

You don't need to track formatting changes like fixing the margins, or deleting one space when the author uses two spaces after each period (since doing so will generate a lot of red ink and changes the author will have to accept), but it is courteous to the author to track any other change you make on a manuscript and it is a standard copyediting practice.

Tracking your changes helps prevent you from introducing any errors into the manuscript as the author will (or at least should) review each change you make before accepting it.

Format the Manuscript

To make it easier to spot errors and to meet industry standards, format the manuscript this way (with track changes turned off):

- Make sure the formatting defaults in Word are set so hyphenation is turned off, that the page size is 8.5"x11", and that the margins are one inch all around. Change the font to Times New Roman size 12.
- Double-space the manuscript and make sure it's ragged right, not justified.
- Paragraph indents should be set to 0.25" (add this setting in the Paragraph menu; don't use tabs). Paragraphs should be indented, not block.
- Use find + replace to delete extra spaces. Authors, especially older ones who learned to type on a typewriter, often use two spaces after a period.

I always explain all of these changes in an overall query to the author/client when I deliver the edit so that the author doesn't keep making the same mistakes.

Use Technology to Help

Then, run a spellcheck program. This won't,

of course, catch spelling errors like homophones (there, their, they're) but it will help you spot the most egregious errors. Don't assume that the author has already done this.

There are other programs you can use to help ensure consistency throughout the manuscript (such as [PerfectIt](#)), and if you decide to pursue CE, you'll want to learn about those.

Editorial Passes

You will need to take more than one pass through the manuscript to catch all the problems. Each pass should have a specific purpose, depending on the level of copyedit you're doing. If it's a light copyedit, your passes will focus on correcting typos, factual errors, and inconsistencies.

For a more involved copyedit, you might have passes that focus on word choice, awkward and confusing sentences, and ensuring consistency with the style guide.

Do remember, however, that each pass should be done with focused effort. You can usually be more effective at spotting errors if you take three very intentional passes at a manuscript than if you more casually read it nine or ten times. The more familiar you are with a manuscript, the less likely you are to

spot its problems—familiarity causes you to see what you expect to see, not what's actually there.

Your last pass should be focused on ensuring you have caught all the egregious errors and that the manuscript is consistently standardized.

When copyediting, I always do a final pass with Word's Read Aloud function enabled. This has helped me catch countless errors. It is often easier to hear the error than to see it.

Don't Shift Your Job to the Author

Newer copy editors sometimes try to shift the work back to the author, such as by saying things like, "Decide whether to use open or closed em dashes and then apply consistently throughout." But that's *your* job as a copy editor. You decide, then apply consistently throughout.

Similarly, in questions of consistency, you should edit so the manuscript is consistent with the default. That is, if Maurice is bald for the first twenty-five chapters but brown-haired in Chapter Twenty-Six, and no hairpiece has been introduced, then make the correction (with a query to the author explaining why you made the edit).

The Importance of a Rigorous Process

As this process overview implies, doing a copyedit requires a significant investment of time and attention. Most editors can only work in two- and three-hour blocks of time before they have to rest and do something else for a while. A copy editor's accuracy is compromised by long hours, so be careful to include some elbow room in your schedule!

Having a rigorous methodology will help you catch as many errors as possible in a manuscript. But I did want to point out that even the very best copy editors using the very best tools miss errors. That is just the nature of human endeavor.

Our goal is, of course, to catch all of the errors (actual errors, not judgment calls). But it is important to recognize that errors slip through. When you see one, or one is called to your attention, learn what you can from the situation and move on.

A rigorous methodology will help prevent errors from slipping through, but you should not let fear of an error getting by stop you from doing your work.

But remember that I'm talking about *errors*; restraint in copyediting is an excellent virtue in a beginning copy editor! Just because you *could* change something doesn't mean you *should*.

Finally, remember the editor's mantra: "It's not my book." It can be hard to see an author reject your excellent edits or fail to follow any of your amazing recommendations but ultimately the author has the final say.

Keeping Track of Style with a Style Sheet

When you're working as a professional copy editor, you'll record your style choices and editing decisions on a style sheet, which will accompany the manuscript to its next stop. The style sheet is just a document that helps the proofreader or next person in line understand the choices you've made. A style sheet lists specific decisions you've made for handling certain copyediting situations.

Many clients will provide a style sheet template, but in some cases you will need to develop your own (such as with an indie author client) or supplement what has been provided. Every client and every project is going to have quirks that are specific to that project or that publisher.

*The Chicago Guide to Copyediting Fictio*n by Amy J. Schneider includes a number of example style sheets for novels. This is a resource well worth reading/owning if you are interested in copyediting.

Style Sheet Elements

What a style sheet covers:

- Resources used (e.g., CMOS)
- Special symbols (particularly common in technical subjects)
- Permissions and credits needed (it's especially common for indie authors to include song lyrics without having the permission to use them)
- Tables, figures, and captions
- Dates and numbers (spelled out or numerals)
- Timeline (especially for fiction)
- Character names and spellings (often with character descriptions), usually kept separately from the alphabetical list (see below)
- Punctuation, abbreviations, and acronyms
- Alphabetical list—this is a list of words specific to certain subjects that aren't necessarily going to be found in Merriam-Webster. This list may also include words that vary in their spelling from what Merriam-Webster lists, but which the client prefers. It can also include words that are unusual to you or are repeated frequently in the project,

that you don't want to have to look up every time you come across them.

Style Sheet Template

Book Title:	*You know what to do here.*
Copyedited by:	*If working with a publisher or corporate client, include your contact information in case anyone else (such as a proofreader) needs to contact you to clarify a point. An indie author client would presumably already have your contact information.*
Sources used:	*For example, Chicago, 17th* *M-W online. Include links to any sites you used for fact-checking. None of these should be Wikipedia.*
Character Names or Named Individuals:	*In alphabetical order, include brief description for fiction, credentials*

	and affiliations for nonfiction (for example: Smith, PhD, John, professor of English, University of California Los Angeles).
Spelling (keep in alphabetical order):	*For any unusual or technical terms, for made-up words used in some types of fiction, for nonstandard spelling of words (such as "Ah-Mazing!") and for defaulting to author's preference when author prefers a secondary spelling (for example, "imposter" instead of "impostor") or atypical spelling (for example, "towards" is typically the spelling used in the UK but if an American author prefers it, it can be allowed — but you have to list it here so the proofreader or someone else doesn't change them all to "toward."*
Abbreviations	*This section spells out*

and acronyms:	*the meaning of abbreviations and acronyms and shows how they should be written. For example, I always use the abbreviation "CMOS" but some people use "CMoS." This is the spot to include which one you've applied consistently throughout the manuscript.* *Some editors include only variations from the style guide. For example, per CMOS, periods are omitted in abbreviations with two or more capital letters (such as "PhD") but if your author prefers to use the period, you would include that here.* *In fiction, if words are spelled out in dialogue but abbreviated in the narrative, that would be*

	recorded here (such as "Mr. Smith wore bifocals" but "I said to him, 'Mister Smith, I found your glasses' but he ignored me"). *I include all abbreviations and acronyms present in the manuscript since that makes it easier for anyone coming after me to easily check the correct abbreviation/acronym.* *Most manuscripts don't include that many of these so it's easy enough to include.*
Capitalization:	*Note any special treatment of job titles, list proper nouns, such as the names of corporations, and their correct capitalization, and so on.*
Numbers:	*Though CMOS has a rule for how numbers*

	should be written, sometimes we'll want to go in a different direction. For a math textbook, we would use numerals for all numbers instead of spelling out some of them.
	A novelist might use numerals in the narrative but spell them out in dialogue: "It was 200 miles to Omaha" versus "Martha, I've told you two hundred times to stop nagging me!"
Punctuation:	*If you're defaulting to the author preference on anything in variance to CMOS, list it here: Author uses open em dashes, author prefers not to use commas after introductory phrases, etc.*
	For fiction, if the author

	prefers to use nonstandard punctuation for dialogue, list that here after you've desperately tried to talk them out of it.
Other matters:	*This section is for any other matter that the author (and any other editor) needs to be aware of. If the manuscript includes song lyrics, for example, and you don't know if permissions have been obtained, you would note that here. If you and the author have worked out a decision to use courtesy titles in their manuscript (despite CMOS generally advising against it), you would include that decision here. Call this the "misc." pile.*

Use a Copyediting Checklist

I typically use a CE checklist to ensure I don't miss anything when I edit. Here's mine. You may discover a different approach works best for you, but this one works for me. Customize it to suit each project (some of these items apply to fiction only, so you wouldn't follow them for nonfiction):

Copyediting Checklist

__Check notes from your manuscript assessment, if any, and add to checklist as appropriate

__Confirm style guide, American English (versus British, Canadian, etc.), basic parameters of the edit

__Check formatting

__Turn off automatic hyphenation

__Make sure pages are set to size 8.5"x 1" with one-inch margins all around

  __Times New Roman font size 12

  __Paragraphing is by using the paragraphing tool, not tabs

  __Delete second space after periods

__Run spellcheck to fix obvious typos and spelling errors

__Make a grammar-and-punctuation pass

__Dialogue, if any, is punctuated correctly

__Direct thoughts are italicized (when appropriate)

__Words are hyphenated correctly

__Errors with homophones are corrected (their, there, they're)

__Omitted words have been caught

__Improperly capitalized words have been fixed

__Basic grammar is suited to the story

__Address sentence- and paragraph-level issues

__Awkwardly stated sentences that confuse readers have been revised

__Dense paragraphs have been broken up

__New dialogue (new speaker) is placed in separate paragraph

__Scene breaks treated consistently (for example, two hard returns between scenes, or a centered asterisk between scenes, but not both)

__Basic fact-checking (for example, the US Independence Day holiday being described as the Fourth of June)

__Dates are accurate (as above)

__Names of cities, landmarks, buildings, companies are spelled and punctuated correctly

__Timeline is accurate: If it's Monday

morning in Chapter One and it's six hours later in Chapter Two, it can't also be Friday
__Consistency
  __Elements are treated consistently throughout—for example, all em dashes are either open or closed, not some of one and some of the other
  __Character names/attributes are consistently represented throughout
  __Setting facts are consistent throughout
__Head-hopping, if any, has been addressed (if agreed)
__Read Aloud pass (use the Word Read Aloud function to catch any final errors)
__Final review of edits and queries to ensure accuracy and diplomacy
__Anything the AU asked about:

This checklist is different from the style sheet. It's for your personal use, to ensure you've done a thorough edit. It is kept in addition to the style sheet. The style sheet is passed on to the author or the client for use in the next stage of the publication process but the checklist is not.

Chapter Thirteen: Line Editing

Line editing, which is polishing the sentence-level prose of a manuscript, never used to be a separate editorial role. It was always either part of development or of copyediting. But with the rise of indie publishing, authors have looked for editors who can help them elevate their prose while also preventing egregious story problems from slipping through.

Line editing is primarily used for fiction manuscripts. For nonfiction, we would typically just use a medium- or heavy-level copyedit to address bigger issues than would be dealt with in a light copyedit.

Line editing addresses awkward, lengthy, or confusing sentence structures by revising them. It also includes tightening flabbiness and removing unnecessary repetition. For fiction, this includes trimming filtering ("she heard the bell ring" versus "the bell rang") and superfluous action (such as describing all the steps it took for Jack to get ready for work when all that's needed is for the author to say,

"Jack got ready for work").

It also includes addressing dialogue that seems wooden, off (not what the character would say under the circumstances), or anachronistic.

If you're more interested in helping authors make their language sing than on chasing down every stray comma, line editing might be for you!

If you're good at line editing and you have an eagle eye, you might combine copyediting with line editing to help stand out from the crowd.

Differences Between Copyediting and Line Editing

Line editing and copyediting are related but different types of sentence-level editing. Both focus on the sentence level, but they are not the same thing.

Copyediting is about ensuring consistency across a manuscript, correcting egregious errors, making sure the manuscript conforms to a specific style guide, and otherwise smoothing the prose so the reader doesn't encounter any sentence-level hiccups as they read.

Here's an example:

James and his father walked towards the barn it was a warm day with the sunshine brightly. The bull was in the pasture and he alerted because he seemed to be spearing something with his horns.

A CE might edit that to read:

James and his father walked towards the barn. It was a warm day with the sun shining brightly. The bull was in the pasture and James alerted because the bull seemed to be spearing something with his horns.

The CE isn't worried about whether the scene is very entertaining or if the character development is effective. The CE is just making sure the sentences are understandable.

Line editing, strictly speaking, could be any edit that takes place at the sentence level. In that argument, we could say that copyediting is a subset of line editing.

But in practice, line editing is less concerned about making sure the commas are in the right place and more concerned with ensuring that the prose is as effective (and in the case of

fiction, emotionally compelling) as it can be.
Here's an example:

> A few minutes later, they reached a small collection of fisherfolk cottages that lay outside the eastern stretch of the city wall, and they slowed to a walk, Lucinda breathing fast and Meretropia pausing to take deep lungsful of air.
>
> "The Denu are coming!" Lucinda called out to the first householder she met, an older woman with her arms full of firewood. "Seek shelter! The Denu are coming!"
>
> The woman frowned at her, then shook her head as if to judge the folly of some people and went inside her cottage.
>
> Simon joined her cry: "The Denu are coming!"

Reading that, you may feel that something isn't working quite as well as it could. But there is nothing incorrect about how the sentences have been written. A CE would have nothing to do here.

An LE would recognize that the tension is being drained by having the characters slow down. Also, the LE would see that the verb "reached" isn't very active. The LE might make the following edit:

> They raced towards a small collection of cottages that lay outside the eastern stretch of the city wall.
>
> "The Denu are coming!" Lucinda called out to the first householder she met, an older woman with her arms full of firewood. "Seek shelter! The Denu are coming!"
>
> The woman frowned at her, then shook her head as if to judge the folly of some people and went inside her cottage.
>
> Simon joined her cry: "The Denu are coming!"

As you can see, a line editor diagnoses what is causing story (or bigger-picture) problems at the sentence level. A CE is more concerned about what is causing readability problems at the sentence level. Obviously there is significant overlap between the two skills.

Overall Goals for Line Editing

Here's what we're looking for in a line edit:

1. Edit or call out story elements that are confusing to the reader. We can help the author see that (for example) using the word "handbag" throughout a scene and then suddenly referring to a "satchel" could confuse readers. ("Is this the handbag with the stolen gems? Or something else?") And it's readily fixable at the sentence level. We might also straighten out confusing action sequences or simply assign an action to a character when it isn't clear.

2. Track and ensure continuity. If it's morning at the beginning of Chapter One, and ten minutes later it's midnight, something's wrong. If Maddock is bald in Chapter Two, he shouldn't have grown hair in Chapter Ten without explanation. Help the author by noting any such inconsistencies in the manuscript.

3. Edit dialogue to avoid the deadly sins: speeches that run on and on, polemic (no one is interested in being lectured), "As you know, Bob" conversations (info-dumping), mundane dialogue

("Should we get coffee?" "Yes, let's get coffee." "Where should we go?" "Oh, I don't know. How about that new place on Tenth?"), overuse of dialogue tags, overuse of adverbs in dialogue tags, overuse of verbs other than "said" in the dialogue tags.

4. Trim away over-exposition and info-dumping. A cardinal rule we should follow is: "Don't bore the reader." As a line editor, you can't do much about a boring plot but you can show the author how to get to the heart of a conversation or scene faster.

5. Polish the prose (without damaging the author's voice). Most fiction is written in what we might call a basic prose style and that's fine. We don't need to encourage the author to magically develop a Faulkneresque style. What we're trying to do is make sure the writing isn't getting in the way of the story. Sometimes authors descend into purple prose or overwriting to show their literary chops but this rarely improves a story. (This is genre-related; for literary fiction, such artifices may work/be acceptable for a given manuscript.)

6. Eliminate triteness and overused words and phrases, including character actions. For example, I recently edited a manuscript where everyone was chuckling all the time. This word is unusual enough that readers are likely to notice its overuse. Similarly, for some authors, characters are always punctuating dialogue by shrugging or shaking their heads. Giving them something more to do can help keep a story from feeling dull and trite.

7. Help the author infuse the work with more narrative drive, power, and emotional resonance through judicious trimming away of wordiness, selection of the right words, trimming away sentences where the author shows *and* tells (versus choosing one or the other), and otherwise helping the author bring out the best in their story at the sentence level.

8. Avoid inadvertent –isms. Sometimes authors aren't aware of a language change that has taken place and use language that is outdated or offensive. If the character is supposed to be racist/sexist/etc., then that's a

legitimate choice for an author to make. But as a line editor, you will sometimes encounter manuscripts with a fair amount of racism, sexism, etc. that the author does not appear to intend. Diplomatic queries can help alert the author to the problem.

9. Perform basic fact-checking. In line editing, we're not expected to be experts in any particular subject nor to spend significant time doing the fact-checking, but we should investigate suspicious information ("He became chief of police in New York City five years after he graduated from the police academy" is highly, highly unlikely) and then query it if needed.

10. Edit perspective and point-of-view problems (for example, head-hopping) and deepen or broaden perspective to help the reader either be more immersed in the viewpoint character's perspective or oriented to the overall scene and situation, depending on what is needed.

When to Make Manuscript Edits

In my discussion of query types, I said that sometimes you'll suggest that the author make

a change to the manuscript ("Consider rephrasing for clarity") and sometimes you'll make the change yourself ("Rephrased for clarity. Edit okay?").

When do you make the change yourself as the editor? When do you leave it up to the author?

The answer is, it depends! In copyediting, we have a clearer set of guidelines: we correct basic style and obvious errors in a light edit, we do that plus suggest changes that could make the manuscript easier to read in a medium edit, and in a heavy edit, we make all the changes, both the style/egregious error edits and the more subjective awkward phrasing and wordy sentence edits.

Line editing doesn't have those clear demarcations, so whether you should make the changes yourself or leave them up to the author depends on three things:

- Having the knowledge to make the change yourself
- Determining whether creative invention is needed
- Deciding with the author ahead of time

Having the Knowledge

Do you have the knowledge to make the fix yourself? Suppose you encounter this sentence:

Roger the book to George.

Obviously, a word has been omitted. But what word? Tossed, mentioned, recommended, gave, passed? The surrounding context might tell you ("George caught the book and . . ."). In that case, you can make the edit. But if you don't have the necessary context, all you can do is suggest the author address the problem.

Creative Invention

Can you make the edit without doing the act of invention yourself? For example, you might catch that Nicolas's physical appearance isn't described anywhere in the manuscript. You could make something up ("He was tall, with a squint, and had long sideburns"), but that's the author's role, not yours. In such a situation, you would query the author and suggest they add a sentence or two of character description.

In contrast, there might be a gap of five chapters from the first time Audrey is mentioned to the second time she's mentioned,

and you might decide it would help to remind the reader who she is. You could edit the manuscript to add a brief mention ("Audrey, Marcel's lawyer, bustled into the room.")

Mutual Decision

What you and the author have decided. Authors will sometimes come to us for line editing and think they know what that means and then they get the edited manuscript back and are shocked that you changed their beautiful, precious words. How could you, you monster!!??!?

So, the thing to do is show samples of what line editing looks like and then ask for the author to review your work on the first few pages or perhaps the first chapter. If they're surprised at how much you've done, you'll know to edit less and suggest more; if they love what you've done, keep on doing it.

Chapter Fourteen: Proofreading

Proofreading is typically the last step in the preparation of any manuscript and is meant to guard against egregious errors slipping through into a published version of a manuscript.

The Impact of Artificial Intelligence

Here I want to say a word about Artificial Intelligence (AI) and technology. Because technology tools like AI are becoming very powerful and very inexpensive to use, they are replacing human workers at low-skill jobs, and proofreading is a fairly low-skill job that can be done with a fair degree of success by non-human programs. This editorial niche is, in my opinion, the most vulnerable to being entirely replaced with AI.

We have already seen many news organizations downsize their copyediting and proofreading staffs. This will only continue to occur as AI becomes better at doing these types of jobs.

Editorial roles that require significant

human thought and judgment, such as developmental editing and line editing, are unlikely to ever be replaced entirely by machine learning, and so I encourage people considering an editing career to move into those areas. Copyediting is more vulnerable than LE and DE but because it does require a fair amount of decision-making, it is less vulnerable than proofreading.

I still feel that having a solid grasp of copyediting and proofreading skills will serve you well as an editor, and they are both great places to start because they are fairly easy to learn and there are still many opportunities to get paid for these services.

Establish Your English Dialect

As with copyediting, you need to establish the type of English the manuscript is written in. Clients, especially indie authors, may not always recognize that they need a proofreader for their particular dialect (Canadian English, British English, etc.)

If you're accustomed to American English and proofread American English, you should not try to proof other types of English unless the client is specifically Americanizing the text and you're going to ensure that no non-American-standard usages and spellings slip

in.

As with copyediting, it is very difficult to switch between different dialects of English and catch everything, so I recommend sticking with one version (at least until you have a lot of experience under your belt).

Elements of Proofreading

For a publisher client, you'll usually be looking at the galley, which is typically a PDF of the laid-out book exactly as it is intended to be published.

Sometimes you'll be comparing the copyedited pages with the laid-out pages to make sure the laid-out pages follow the copyedit correctly, but this is becoming less and less common since most work is done digitally these days, not by hand on paper.

For indie authors you may be asked to look at the manuscript before it's converted to ebook, you may be asked to review the ebook preview, or you may be asked to look at an advance reading copy (ARC) of a paperback book. You'll want to be clear that you know which it is ahead of time, as some of these options are more difficult to work with than others.

For all clients, you will want to set clear expectations regarding how you will deliver

your proofread. Will you be:

- Using digital sticky notes to mark up a PDF? This can be done in a PDF reader program, but actually making changes to a PDF requires a tool like Adobe Acrobat or another third-party software option to do effectively. (Copying and pasting the PDF into Word in order to make edits will not preserve the layout and will result in an unsatisfactory proofread.)
- Recording necessary changes in a table? In this case, you'll fill out a form that gives page number and location of the error.
- Doing the actual correction yourself on a Word document? If so, this will typically be done with track changes turned on so the author or client can double-check to ensure that errors aren't being added in.

Make sure you understand the procedure and do a test run that the client responds to in order to ensure that your approach is acceptable.

What Proofreaders Look For

In most instances, you'll be on the lookout for obvious errors, like typos, or any kind of

formatting glitches that have occurred during the transition to layout.

You'll make sure:

- Running heads are consistent (a running head is the information at the top of the page that gives the book title, the chapter title, and/or the author's last name)
- Tables and illustrations are captioned clearly
- No TK ("to come") information
- Headers are styled correctly (for example, a chapter title should look different from a section header and all chapter titles should look alike)
- No typos or omitted words have slipped through
- Overall, the manuscript has no glaring quality issues, such as chapters not starting on a new page

When working with publishers, you should be given a style sheet (see Chapter Thirteen) with the project. Indie authors may have one of these but don't expect it.

Usually you won't add anything to the style sheet, you'll just consult it, but if there is some kind of unexpected variation, you would want to check with your client about how to proceed

("the style sheet says Megan, but it's spelled Meghan on every instance in the manuscript; should it be Megan or Meghan?").

Publisher clients will usually have a basic guide to proofreading that they want you to follow. Indie authors typically won't, so you'll want to use your best judgment and communicate expectations clearly ahead of time.

Proofreading v. Proofediting

You may hear the term "proofediting" which refers to proofreading a manuscript and doing more than just correcting egregious errors. It also includes light copyediting, such as to ensure consistency across the manuscript. For this, you would need to be well-versed in copyediting as well as proofreading skills.

Be aware that some people use the term "proofediting" and related descriptions ("just proofread it but let me know if there are any bigger issues") to devalue the work of copy editors. Copyediting is typically a higher-paying editorial role (versus proofreading) because it is more complex and time-consuming to do and is considered a higher-skilled job.

In general, since proofreading is considered a lower-skilled (and therefore is a lower-paid)

job, it is easier to break into than other types of editorial work, especially for corporate clients like publishers. But do be aware of my warning about AI above; this is an editorial role that in all likelihood will vanish in the coming years.

Part Four

Additional Sources of Income for Writer-Editors

Chapter Fifteen: Coaching Writers

Another way to earn money from your writing and editing skills is by coaching writers who are encountering writing problems you've encountered and know how to solve.

For me, coaching is anything that helps writers write better stories that isn't the finite act of reading a manuscript and giving feedback on it (because that's editing, or some version of it). So if someone wants help plotting their next book or finding time to do the work, the support you offer is what I would call coaching.

Common Misconceptions About Coaching

One common misconception people have is thinking that coaching is a lengthy, ongoing process, like therapy, and they don't necessarily feel confident in offering something like that (nor are they confident their clients could pay a reasonable fee for it). I mean, *I'd* be nervous with the idea of

committing to a client for weekly meetings for the next six months.

But coaching isn't therapy. You can coach a client for an hour or two and be done. If you're helping another author solve a problem of limited scope, that may be all the help they ever need from you. That doesn't mean it isn't worthwhile (for you or them).

As you build confidence, maybe you start offering ongoing coaching to support authors throughout the writing and revision process. But you don't need to start where you end up. You just need to start somewhere.

The second most common misconception is editors thinking that coaching is all about giving advice. They're concerned that they don't know enough to answer every writing question a client might have.

I've been helping writers for over twenty years and I don't know all the answers, so I understand this objection. But coaching isn't a transaction where you dispense wisdom as soon as a coin is inserted into your wallet. It's a process where you and the author work together to discover the solutions.

What Coaching Can Include

In my admittedly loose definition of coaching, I include anything that helps a writer

that isn't actually an edit. So this might be:

- helping them brainstorm ways to find time to write
- serving as an accountability partner as they draft or revise a manuscript
- reviewing disparate feedback from a variety of beta readers to help them gain clarity about what should be accomplished in the revision
- helping them understand the reasons for the rejection letters they're getting from agents
- reviewing the first few chapters of a manuscript to help them figure out why they've stalled
- helping them brainstorm solutions to problems they've already identified in their work

As you can see, some of these don't require a lot of expertise in storytelling techniques, so they can be a good place to start if you'd like to build up your confidence first. And of course there are dozens of possibilities I haven't listed here.

The key is to start with something you feel fairly confident about offering and to build from there. Maybe you're really good at using

time effectively and can show some of your techniques to writers. You could call yourself a productivity coach for writers.

Maybe you know all about technology tools that can help authors in their work. Maybe you're the person who can match writers to the best tools for them to use.

Maybe you're just a really good listener. People often know how to solve their own problems, they just need someone to listen to them as they figure it out. (Countless times I've had writers solve their own problem just a few minutes into a coaching session—once, even before the coaching session took place!)

Any of those skills (and many more) are excellent places to start.

Whether you're qualified to offer a specific type of coaching depends on your past experience, so if you don't have any traditional publishing experience it would be a stretch to say that you can help writers get published. Do look at your already established skills and begin there.

I hope I've established that you don't have to have Ah-mazing!!! credentials to offer coaching. You just need to be honest about your capabilities and match them to what writers need.

Starting with Your Current Experience

I have a lot of experience in traditional publishing, so authors will often ask me to critique a query and/or synopsis. Or they'll ask if they can have a phone call with me to go over their pitch for a pitch session at a conference. These things I feel confident in doing. Someone who didn't have much experience in traditional publishing wouldn't understand what makes a good pitch so this wouldn't be a good service for them to offer.

I used to work with writers for whom English is a second language but I haven't done that in years. I don't know what the good current resources in this area are or what the latest research shows regarding effective coaching. So I don't offer that type of service anymore.

The best way to break into coaching is to figure out what you already know and do well and connect the dots to how you can use it to help writers.

We sometimes think of coaching as one big pie where we have to know everything there is to know about writing and publishing to offer it, but really coaching is a bunch of slices crammed together. You can probably coach one of those slices right now.

If you don't have a lot of experience, the

way to do anything like this is to start small and scaffold up.

Here's an example. Your local writing group would probably be glad to have you lead a session on how to use the five senses in their writing.

Once you have this experience, you can offer a class or workshop for the local arts center/parks-and-rec program/senior center. Now you're a local expert on the five senses in writing and it took you a month.

Next, pitch a workshop for a regional or national writers' conference. Now you're someone who teaches writers about using the five senses. Your coaching fee for offering this help one-on-one is $X per hour.

Finding Coaching Clients

In general, I find that indie authors don't hire us for coaching out of the blue. No matter how great your website is, an indie author isn't going to stumble over it and say, "Coaching is exactly what I need! How much will it cost?"

Even if someone you know makes a referral, it's rare for an author who doesn't know you and hasn't worked with you before to hire you for coaching. Don't be surprised by that, but do take steps so that potential clients *can* get to know you.

Let Clients Get to Know You

First, give prospective clients an easy way to learn more about you and how you approach writing. This is where writing and talking about writing on social media (and in other places) can help potential clients get to know you before they book a coaching session with you.

Next, you have to think about how to stand out from others who offer editing/coaching services. What in your background, past experience, and/or personality is different/unique/useful to the writers you want to work with?

If you've worked with writers in the past, what particular problems did you help them unknot? What kind of mentoring did you do and at what point in the writing process did you do it?

Your special skills don't even have to be writing/publishing-related, exactly. I recently had a talk with an editor who markets to a law of attraction crowd because she's very into that. So, explore why indie authors might want to work with you versus someone else.

Offer Specific Solutions

Then consider what specific solutions you can offer to potential coaching clients. For a

long time I would say, "Yes, I do coaching! I can coach writers and editors on craft and business concerns!" And no one would ever sign up.

Then I started creating lists of things I could specifically do: For writers,

- I can review and give feedback on your query letter.
- I can educate you on how publishing works and help you come up with a plan for getting an agent.
- For editors, I can review a manuscript you've edited and give feedback on your work.

Once people saw the specifics, they could imagine themselves wanting that. Then, even if they had a request that wasn't on the list, they would ask me ("Can you help me figure out what these rejections mean?" came up after I communicated that I could give feedback on a query letter).

Welcome Potential Clients

Be sure to give people a low-barrier way to interact with you without having to schedule a coaching session. This could be having an easy way for them to contact you on your website,

or holding occasional Q&A sessions online, or giving a talk or presentation for a group (where they can ask you questions about how you work and about how coaching with you works).

If someone does reach out in some way, such as by commenting on a blog post, be sure to interact with them. This responsiveness helps build trust—that you won't let them down or leave them hanging.

It's true that sometimes people will basically want a coaching session without paying for one, so I typically offer some general advice and show them where and how to get more, including some free or low-cost resources: "How to start a freelance business is a big question, too big for me to answer in the comments on a LinkedIn post, but I've written about some key decisions to make before you start a freelance business on my blog [LINK]. I also have a book that takes you through it step by step [LINK]. When people need more customized advice than that, I offer coaching [LINK]."

I also strongly urge you to create a newsletter list (which I described in Chapter Seven). This is another low-barrier way for potential clients to get to know you and to come to trust you enough to want to hire you

for coaching.

Some coaches offer a free introductory call of fifteen minutes or so but I hate talking on the phone enough that I don't do that. I am willing to answer basic questions by email, along the lines of what I've suggested above—starting with some general advice and providing low-cost resources (as well as suggesting coaching).

Following these steps will help you drum up coaching clients. Don't forget to ask for testimonials (which will help you land other clients) and to be open to feedback about your coaching. The way to get better is to learn from clients.

One of my favorite resources for learning more about coaching is Michael Bungay Stanier's book, *The Coaching Habit*. Another is *The Tao of Coaching* by Max Landsberg. Either (or both) of these can help you develop a framework for your coaching sessions.

Chapter Sixteen: Creating Information Products

As I've spent the last few chapters describing, what freelance editors do is provide a service (editing a manuscript). But if you're not actively providing that service, you're not making any money. That's the basic situation of being in a service business.

One way to generate extra income is to offer products (such as books and white papers) that are less time-intensive to deliver and that still support your writer-editor career. Since these products typically require writing skill, they fit a writer-editor career well.

Not Passive Income

You'll notice that nowhere in the content of this chapter do I use the words "passive income." (Other than right here!) And that's because none of what I'm talking about is *passive* income. Passive income is earned without any additional effort on your part, like a dividend earned from a stock you own. You purchased the stock and that was all you did.

After that, the dividends come whether you do anything else or not.

Lots of people like to tout things like ebooks as being passive income streams but they're not passive. If you write a book, and put it up on Amazon, and make no effort to market it, then I'm sorry to say you're unlikely to earn a dime.

But once you've written and published the information product, the additional effort you need to make is a marketing effort, which can be ramped up or down depending on other demands on your time. And once your product has been out for a while, you will probably see that some sales are attributable to word-of-mouth. Those sales don't require you to do anything but produce a good product.

The Bidirectionality of Marketing

These information products have to be marketed, just like your writer-editor business has to be marketed, and you may ask, "Why don't I just market my business in the first place and skip the product?" And the reason is that an editorial service is an expensive purchase (or damn well ought to be!).

You may spend a lot of time on social media talking about writing and editing and building up your reputation as a great writer-editor. But

no matter how much a writer likes your posts, they may not be ready to spend $2000 or $5000 on an editing package. But they may be perfectly willing to spend $20 on an ebook.

The ebook helps them get to know you better. If they're happy with the content, they're one step closer to hiring you.

Here are some examples from my personal work. I wrote a book called *Dojo Wisdom for Writers* some years ago. People who read that book would sometimes come to my website to learn more about me and from there they would hire me as a writing coach or to edit their work.

When I was ghostwriting a lot of nonfiction books, I taught a class on how to write book proposals (which, as I described earlier, are how nonfiction books are sold to publishers). In addition to getting income from the course, I earned money when people hired me to write their proposals for them.

For my current business (Club Ed) I have a book, *The Club Ed Guide to Starting and Running a Profitable Freelance Editing Business*, which I wrote five or so years ago. (And now I have this one!) People who read that book often make their way over to Club Ed itself and take a class. Once they've taken a class, they occasionally hire me for coaching. Sometimes

they hire me to edit their manuscripts.

The Sales Funnel and Information Products

What I'm describing is basically a sales funnel, which you've probably heard about. A sales funnel is a way to move prospects (that is, potential clients) from thinking about hiring you to actually hiring you. If you imagine a funnel, you can see that the neck is thinner than the mouth. So the idea is that the funnel takes in more prospective clients than you will ever turn into actual clients.

Some clients will get swept into the mouth of the funnel but they won't go any further. These are people who sign up for a free newsletter or a low-cost product.

Others will go further down the funnel, purchasing more expensive products until you've convinced a magical few to pop for the big investment (in our case, that would be a big-ticket edit).

So, you can see how my Club Ed book could be considered the mouth of the funnel, and classes in the thinner body, and more expensive coaching (or editing) the narrow neck. More people will buy the book than will ever buy the coaching/editing.

But before I get too deep into a discussion

about how you can do the same, what I want to point out is that in my experience, if you do this right, it's not a funnel, it's an ecosystem. Or maybe a more apt analogy would be a mosaic, where the pieces fit together spatially rather than linearly.

That is to say, the marketing you do is bidirectional. Someone can buy my book and then buy a class, yes, but very often they buy a class and then buy the book.

Or occasionally they'll buy coaching and then a class and then the book. Or sometimes a class but never the book.

That's fine! I don't care. However the client interacts with my products and services is A-OK with me.

You'll notice I've talked a lot about my classes here. That's because I generate a lot of income from classes. I'll talk about that more in the next chapter. For now, suffice it to say that you can include classes (whether self-paced or instructor-led) as part of your sales funnel/ecosystem.

Creating Your Own Sales Funnel

Before we get too far along with this let me emphasize that you don't need a sales funnel. It's a system that works for a lot of people but then a lot of people are doing it and at some

point everyone on the receiving end of this sales tactic recognizes what it is and gets tired of it.

So if you're not feeling it for creating a sales funnel, don't think you have to. You can still offer products and still find that they invite clients into trying your higher-priced products and services. The main thing is just to ensure that you have a landing page (typically a website) where all of your offerings are easy to find. Additionally, each offering should give the client links back to that landing page.

For example, obviously your website should mention your ebook, but your ebook back matter should include a link to your website/landing page so the reader can buy more things from you.

Back to our discussion of sales funnels. A sales funnel typically goes like this: free or cheap thing > more expensive thing > most expensive thing, with various stops on the way.

So, this might be free newsletter > ebook > class > editing package. Or anything like that. Maybe it's newsletter > inexpensive class > coaching package. Or ebook > class > editing package.

Typically, marketers will stress that you should have a clear A to B to C funnel, but I

find it works just as well for there to be an array: A can lead to B, C, D, or E. And B can lead to C or to F or G. And C can lead to B or H, I, J, and/or K.

There is certainly potential for confusion in the mosaic/ecosystem approach but it can also be lucrative, because while a client may be interested in A, they may not be interested in B. But they might be interested in C. However, if their way to C is blocked (they never hear about it) then they're never going to move beyond A.

In other words, maybe they like books and buy your book, but they don't take classes so they're never going to take the class that is your next item in the funnel. Then they drop out of the funnel before they learn about your editing package, which they might have been interested in if only they'd known about it.

That said, when you're first starting out, A to B to C makes sense. You have to create these products and that takes time and effort, so being focused about what you're doing is a good idea.

Before you start to feel overwhelmed and hyperventilate, let me assure you that you don't have to do all of this right this minute. If you establish A first, then you can take your time writing B. As long as your

free/inexpensive item A can lead people to your most expensive item C (such as by including a link in the back of an ebook), then it is fine as a stopgap until you have time to create the next product you need.

Your Newsletter List

Usually a sales funnel starts with efforts to get people on your newsletter list, and I would recommend this approach because it's the best way to be able to market to people who are interested in what you have to say (and sell) without having to worry about algorithms changing or Elon Musk taking over and destroying your network.

For the sales funnel approach, I'm talking about a free newsletter that you send out to people who sign up for it.

"But wait! I don't want to have to commit to writing a newsletter every week!" you may say.

It doesn't have to be every week or even every month. It could just be when you have something to share. But if your sending frequency is less than monthly, it's likely that your list will go stale. People will forget why they signed up for your newsletter and they'll hit the unsubscribe button when they get it (or worse, they'll label it as spam, which makes it

harder for you to deliver your newsletter in the future).

So, I recommend sending your newsletter at least once a month. It should have some information of value in it, so that people won't just hit the unsubscribe button, but it doesn't have to be forty pages of in-depth research about the writing process.

It could be a repurposed blog post or a collection of social media posts. Or you could write the newsletter and repurpose it for your blog and social media posts.

Some people create elaborate onboarding email sequences, where when a person signs up for the newsletter they get a series of emails that tell them how to use their website or attempt to upsell them to the next thing in the funnel.

This is definitely something you might consider exploring once your funnel is established and you're trying to tweak things to make them more effective, but when you're first starting out, just getting the newsletter set up and sending is the main thing to focus on. Get into a predictable sending pattern and get a couple of hundred people on your list before you start worrying about how to optimize it.

Using a Premium

To get writers/potential clients to sign up for your email list, most editors offer them a free premium (often called a lead magnet). At Club Ed, this is a 10% off coupon.

You can experiment with different offers, but if the offer you give is something that you'll have to write, make sure you have the time and knowledge to create something appealing. A good premium typically doesn't have to be anything too elaborate or extensive/long, just something your target audience would be interested in.

That said, you don't have to offer a premium at all. People know exactly what these are used for and they'll often use a throwaway email address in order to get the premium, with no intention of engaging with your newsletter/marketing at all.

It's always better to get people who are interested in what you have to say to join your newsletter list. On my writer site, I don't offer any kind of premium at all for signing up for my newsletter and people still sign up for it.

Using an Email Service

I recommend using an email marketing platform (such as Mailchimp) for sending out newsletters, as this will help you comply with

laws regarding spam email. (You need to be able to show that a recipient opted to receive your emails and they need to be able to easily unsubscribe.)

Even if your list is small, I would recommend against trying to send your newsletter from your personal email service. Other email hosts can label this as spam and your own ISP may throttle sending to more than a handful of people at a time.

Most email services (like Mailchimp, MailerLite, and Substack) have free versions that will be perfectly fine for you to use as you start. You don't typically have to start paying until you have several hundred subscribers, at which point it will be worth your while to fork over the fee.

To make people aware of your premium (if you have one) or your newsletter itself (if you don't), you can use popup forms on your website and share links to the signup form on your social media accounts. Your email marketing platform provider will have information on how to do this (each one is different).

Planning Your Funnel

As you plan your funnel, consider how all the elements integrate. So, if your free

newsletter is going to include tips on how to be a better writer and your next item in the funnel is an ebook on how to market self-published books and that's supposed to lead to the final item in the funnel, booking your editorial services, there's a disconnect there.

To know how to position your first premium, you need to think about who you are as an editor, who your clients are (or who you think/hope they are), and what kind of help they're looking for. You have to think about where your skills and abilities intersect with their problems—that is, their writing-related problems that you can solve.

If your potential clients are all newbie writers, it's likely that they have problems finishing a draft. Maybe they get stuck on a plot problem and don't know what to do after that, or they start to realize how much they have to learn and their motivation flags. If you have particular expertise in helping motivate authors, then you can see where a newsletter premium of "Ten Tips for Finishing Your Draft" could lead to an ebook on how to get unstuck from common writing problems, which could in turn lead to a coaching package.

Work this out ahead of time and do some experimenting before you invest a lot of time

and effort in a product that isn't going to be the right thing for your funnel.

In addition to your premium (to get people to sign up for your free newsletter), you can create:

- paid newsletters
- white papers and other types of research documents that your target audience purchases from you
- ebooks (and of course print, too!)

As you can see, some of these require more of your continued involvement than others. A white paper (a research document of several thousand words) or ebook (a longer document, usually at least 20,000 words) requires marketing once you've completed it, but that's all. It doesn't need to be fed with more content the way a paid newsletter does. As part of your planning, you'll want to think realistically about what type of product you can reasonably write and sell (along with everything else you're doing!)

Determining Who Your Clients Are

Now let's take a step back for a minute. I mentioned knowing who your clients are — or who you want them to be — and I gave an

example of what a funnel might look like if you expect to have newbie authors as your clients (versus more experienced authors).

But you may not quite know yet who your prospective clients are, other than "anyone who wants to hire an editor."

To figure out who your clients are, you can begin with yourself, you can begin with a market you notice is underserved, or you can begin with people who already approach you for help.

Who Are You as an Editor?

To begin with yourself, you need to reflect on who you are as an editor. What special skills and aptitudes do you have and what does this tell you about what kinds of clients you should seek?

For example, if you love romance, read a hundred romances a year, edit tons of romances, and can't get enough of romances, well, it's clear to me that you should be targeting romance writers.

But "who are you as an editor?" doesn't have to relate to genre. It could be a particular skill you have. I happen to be very good at helping people figure out what's going wrong with their conflict. That's related to plot so I might bill myself as the person who can help

writers sort out their plot issues.

Or it might be a particular personal strength, such as being a warm and supportive editor who has terrific patience with new authors. You may feel, "Well, isn't everyone warm and supportive and patient with new authors?" And the answer is no. Some editors want to work only with more experienced authors.

Once you've got some ideas about what's special about you and/or your approach to editing, you have to consider where this intersects with problems writers have that you can solve.

So for the romance editor, think about problems romance authors have. Maybe they struggle to create an effective conflict between the two main characters. Maybe they struggle with getting respect from other writers. If you happen to be a warm and supportive person, then you could solve the problem of helping romance authors learn how to create an effective conflict between the two main characters while showing you respect the genre and will carry out the edit with warmth and support.

You would convey those messages in the type of materials you produce for your sales funnel.

Identify Underserved Clients

The second approach is to find clients by noticing underserved writers. For example, until recently there were few editors who specifically served LGBTQ+ writers. Now there are more because some editors noticed the lack and moved to fill in the hole.

If you're involved in a specific community, especially a specific writing community, you may be aware of an underserved group of writers. It might be related to identity, abilities (writers with ADHD, for example), genre (who works with writers of Westerns these days?), age (one editor I know works specifically with seniors crafting their first works of fiction).

If you know a group is underserved, you can be the person who serves them. Consider what their problems and needs are. For example, maybe an author with ADHD needs more support during the revision process. Then, direct your products at solving those problems.

Who Are Your Current Clients?

Finally, I mentioned that another way to figure out who your clients are is to figure out . . . who your clients are. By this I mean you've probably already edited or advised a few people about writing matters, even if in a very informal way. What can you learn from the types of work

you've done? It's very common to sort of fall into editing and then realize you want to make this an actual job, and then to quickly make up for lost time by learning more broadly how to do the job.

Do a careful assessment of who you've worked with in the past and consider what they may have all had in common. Maybe they were all academic authors who knew you'd successfully revised and published your dissertation through a trade press and now they'd like to learn how. Or maybe they knew you were a whiz at translating technical material into practical terms.

If you already have people who come to you for a specific reason, turn that reason into products for your sales funnel.

Keep Consistent

I mentioned earlier that the elements of your funnel should follow logically—if you're driving towards selling an editing package, you wouldn't have one element be a book about marketing self-published work.

Similarly, you want to keep the general tone of your products consistent. If you have a snarky tone in your newsletter but your ebook is all business, that will feel like a disconnect to clients.

Your tone in your products should also match the message you're trying to send about who you are as an editor. If you want to reassure people that you're warm and supportive, the snark probably ought to be edited out. If you want to prove that you're an eagle-eyed copy editor, you'll want to make sure your own copy is sparkling clean.

Following this general theme of consistency, the cover of your ebook should have some elements in common with your website. Clients shouldn't be confused by looking from one to the other.

Louise Harnby's old-fashioned parlor feel is echoed in the colors of her books for editors, for example. I've tried to make sure the Club Ed books look like the Club Ed website.

I'm not saying you should hire a brand consultant this minute, just that you will want to give some thought as to how you will create unspoken connections among your various products.

Chapter Seventeen: Creating and Teaching Classes

In the last chapter, I talked about products you could sell, like books and white papers. But another type of "product" is a class. Classes do tend to be more time-consuming than other types of products; naturally a class where you will be answering questions or reviewing student work will be more time-intensive to deliver than an ebook, which can be downloaded instantly and automatically.

You can offer different kinds of classes that require different amounts of time; the more time-intensive classes are usually much more expensive than the classes that don't require as much of your involvement. Here are the main ways to teach:

- online, self-paced classes (with no instructor involvement)
- online or in-person classes with instructor involvement
- on-demand webinars (that you record once and sell)

- in-person workshops, talks, and seminars (that you repeat; otherwise, this is basically another service)

An in-person workshop, even if it is a repeat of a talk you've already given, requires more of your time than an on-demand webinar that you recorded once and can sell until the information is old and outdated.

Before I go any further, let me urge you to remember that classes should have actual content! If you're like me, you've encountered those time-wasting marketers who offer a free or low-cost class in some area of interest (for example, "Get Started in Proofreading!") that turn out to be nothing but an infomercial for the higher-cost program.

These may be effective (I have my doubts) but they're not anything I endorse and in the end they damage your reputation more than they enhance your credibility.

And that's what you're trying to do with a class: enhance your credibility. If a writer takes a class with you and comes away thinking you really know your stuff, they're far more likely to hire you to edit their work.

Now imagine that same potential client if they feel you've ripped them off. (Even a "free" class isn't free if it wastes someone's time.)

They're not going to think of you when it comes time to find an editor for their work.

Fitting Your Class Into Your Funnel

That said, your class or classes should fit into your funnel (or mosaic) in some meaningful way. If you have a class on, say, writing cookbooks but your main editorial offering is in editing mysteries, there's too big of a disconnect for the class to lead to anything other than income from the class.

This is a problem not just because the class doesn't lead your client to any of your other offerings. It's a problem because it takes time and effort to market. Someone who is writing a cookbook is probably not also writing a science fiction novel (that would be a VERY niche audience), so you would be marketing to science fiction writers and cookbook authors, who are not hanging out in the same space. You're doing double the effort, but there's no cross-pollination.

On the other hand, if everything in your funnel/mosaic is all about the cozy mystery genre then you're going to get more bang for your marketing buck. You market your genius as a mystery editor and a potential client might buy your ebook, take your class, or hire you as their editor, or any combination of the three.

That's why you see me talk about planning so much. You don't have to do all of the work of writing the newsletter freebie (premium/lead magnet) and the ebook and the course all this week, but you should have a clear idea of how they'll hang together.

What Kind of Class?

Let's dig a little further into the various things I mean by "classes" because it's actually a lot of things! And all of them can be part of your funnel/mosaic.

Webinars

You are undoubtedly familiar with the webinar, which is an online video presentation that you can offer live ("Join me Wednesday, August 8th, at 7 pm Eastern time") or as a recorded, on-demand class ("Watch anytime!"). Obviously you could combine these and have a live webinar where live participants can ask questions, which is then recorded for later viewers. (I think this second strategy is a smart one!)

I'm not talking about a video presentation or lecture being part of a larger class, I'm talking about a self-contained discussion of a topic that begins and ends within the one overall video.

These are an easy way to get started in teaching a class because the format is familiar to people, there are lots of webinar services you can use (such as recording a talk on Zoom), and you can charge a reasonable fee that will account for your prep time and any overhead costs. No one is surprised if a webinar costs $39 or $59 (or more).

The technical aspects may seem intimidating at first, but you can get a simple Whereby plan (currently under $10 a month) and upload the recording to YouTube, protecting it in various ways so that only people who purchase the recording can have access to it.

You don't need a professional production studio because attendees don't expect anything other than a basic webinar format. The main thing is to have a quiet space and a clear agenda for what you'll cover in the webinar.

If you do have the equipment and skills you can upgrade the experience, but most people aren't going to pay more just to have better audio.

You can use the transcription extension on your browser to have live captioning, which while imperfect can be helpful as an accessibility aid for the recording. If you will

be selling the webinar, I do recommend creating a transcript for people who will find that helpful.

Typically webinars run for an hour or ninety minutes. If they go much longer than that they become seminars or workshops. (More on those in a bit.)

Online Classes

This is probably one of the fastest-growing industries at the moment! Online classes can be formatted with an instructor component or without.

Self-paced classes, as I call classes without an instructor component, are popular because once you've written them/recorded them (if there's an audio or visual element), you don't have to do anything else but market them. People enjoy taking them because they don't have to be any specific place at a specific time to do so.

The major drawback to these classes is that without any external deadline, it can be difficult for students to feel motivated to complete them. If students don't complete a class, they can feel they've wasted their money, and some of their unhappy feelings can get transferred to you. Or they feel guilty about not finishing the class and don't want to hire you

for anything else until they do finish the class, which may be never.

You can offer various incentives for people to complete their classes but this can become time-consuming. Just be aware of the issue as you plan.

Instructor-led classes, which do have an instructor component, may include specific times when everyone in the class meets for a virtual session. This session may be supplemented with written materials and exercises.

The virtual meeting may include the instructor lecturing on the topic and then a Q&A (this is a very common approach). The challenge will be creating times to attend that work for all students. Many potential students will choose not to enroll because of the inconvenience of attending at a specific time.

Without a live Q&A, it would make better sense to record the lecture and allow students to view it at their leisure, and then to have a channel for students to ask questions. You could use [Slack](#) or a private Facebook group for this kind of thing.

To provide the most flexibility for students, it's possible to record the lecture and then offer virtual Q&A times that include a variety of possibilities, so that (for example) for Lesson 1,

they could view the recording, then drop in on the Q&A on Tuesday from 9-10 am Eastern or Thursday from 7-8 pm Eastern or Saturday from 2-3 pm Eastern. But as you can see, this quickly becomes time-consuming, and if you only have a few students, you'll be hosting one-on-one Q&As, which isn't very time-efficient.

Because I have students from all over the world, I don't include virtual sessions in my classes as they are impossible to schedule effectively.

All of my class materials are written. This also helps improve accessibility; low vision or blind students can use a text reader, hard-of-hearing or Deaf students can read the materials; individuals with different processing speeds can go at their own pace.

I have always used text-based forums for Q&A, so students can ask their questions whenever they have them. I check daily and answer daily. (This can also be time-consuming but is easier to fit around other tasks than a strict, "I must be in front of my computer on Saturday between 2-3 pm.")

I provide customized feedback on each assignment so students can know exactly what they're doing well and what needs work; for a self-paced class an answer key is a reasonable

substitution, but it is this instructor feedback that makes the increased price for an instructor-led class a reasonable investment for a student to make.

I do believe all classes with an instructor component should include this type of instructor feedback on student work, as this is the main reason students want to take a class with an instructor. Again, this can be time-consuming, so that needs to be taken into account in your planning.

Because students feel they get more value from a class with an instructor component, they will typically pay significantly more for them than they will self-paced classes. (That said, you'll earn the money doing the instructing!)

Online classes with an instructor component typically last for several weeks; this is commonly four to eight weeks. Over the years I've found that four weeks is a good length, as people drop out over longer classes (life gets in the way). They don't feel they are getting as much value from shorter classes. I have sometimes offered two-week classes for busy editors but the four-week classes are more popular.

Workshops and Seminars

Workshops and seminars can be in-person or virtual/online. They typically cover a significant amount of material in a compressed amount of time. The term "workshop" implies a hands-on component though seminars can have them, too. Often the hands-on component is done in breakout groups.

It's not unusual for a workshop/seminar to last four or six hours across one or two days. I recently gave a seminar that lasted eight hours on a weekend—four hours on the Saturday and four on the Sunday. (It was exhausting for everyone.)

Workshops and seminars typically don't have a self-paced component, except perhaps the expectation that participants will bring some material with them (a query letter, the first chapter of their manuscript).

Whether in-person or virtual, you'll probably be expected to do more than talk for four or eight hours. You'll have to create a PowerPoint or other type of presentation. These can be time-consuming to do well (although they can be reused and revised for other workshops/seminars).

While you can give the same workshop/seminar more than once, because you are expected to be there to deliver it across

the hours that it's scheduled for, these can be time-consuming endeavors.

Consider not just the delivery time but the prep time in making a judgment about whether to offer a workshop/seminar (or accepting an offer to teach one).

In-Person Classes

You can also offer in-person classes, where people physically attend sessions that you offer. These are typically sponsored by an organization known for offering classes, such as a parks-and-recreation department, an art center (The Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis, for example), or a college.

You can also self-sponsor an in-person class, such as by reserving a meeting room at the local public library (they may charge a fee if you charge a fee) and promoting the event.

In general, in-person classes don't pay well/earn well and require a lot of in-person involvement, making them a harder way to earn money.

Talks

Like in-person classes, a talk is a live offering (if it's not in person, it's a webinar; see "Webinars" above), typically sponsored by an organization. People often give talks at

conferences, for example. Sometimes you can get paid to give the talk. Sometimes it's a good way to spread the word about what you do, as attendees will have a chance to meet you in person and ask questions.

One way to "productize" talks (that is, to make each one less time intensive to prepare) is to give the same talk for different groups. That way you reduce the amount of time it takes to earn your fee. Suppose a writers' group offers $200 for you to give a one-hour talk about, say, writing the perfect query letter. That's not a lot of money for prepping the talk, transporting yourself to the venue, delivering the talk, answering questions about the talk, possibly having to socialize with people after the talk, and transporting yourself home.

But if you can give that talk to ten writers' groups, and offer it is a webinar recording on your website (for a fee), it might be more worthwhile.

Hosting the Class

Classes of various types are often sponsored by outside organizations, such as an arts center. I strongly urge people interested in creating a class to start there. You won't get rich (most organizations don't pay instructors much) but you'll get some excellent experience

and useful feedback in terms of refining your content and who your audience is.

I taught a Writing a Woman's Life class for an arts center when I was first starting out, and though this didn't lead to tons of clients, it did spark me to explore what other classes I could offer. I ended up writing a book proposal class that earned me a bunch of money and many nonfiction book author clients as a result. After that, I began teaching developmental editing for an editors' organization, and that led directly to the establishment of Club Ed!

I recommend starting with local resources first. I worked with my local arts center; there are also parks-and-recs programs; Osher programs (for older adults, sponsored by the Osher Institute); and writers' organizations with local and regional chapters.

The benefit of teaching first for an organization is that they will do much of the marketing for you, so that you can focus on your prep and the delivery of the material.

Do be careful not to sign over rights to your material to the organization! This is a common demand among colleges and universities that pay you for the preparation of the materials (even there you could and should negotiate for their ownership of only nonexclusive rights) but it's terribly egregious for organizations to

expect this when they aren't paying you extra to prep the materials the first time you give the class.

One of the benefits of teaching for an organization is having some amount of pay for doing the work, and then being able to bring the work to another organization, or to self-host a class.

You can self-host classes of any type, of course. This means that you have to find the place to "house" your class materials (such as a website with a learning management system), prep the materials, and do all of the marketing.

It is very common for a class to attract just a few students the first time you offer it, or for ten or fifteen people to sign up the first time you offer it and then no one the next three times you offer it. As with anything that requires people to fork over money, it can take time and persistence to see progress. (Again, one reason why working with an organization first can help—among other things, you can test your ideas!)

You don't have to invest in a complex and expensive technology when you're first starting out. There are lots of platforms that make it simple (for a big cut of the fees, of course) and in the early days you can do a lot

of the work yourself.

Before I had a learning management system on my website, I used to email lessons to my students each week and our discussions were held in a private Facebook group. Nothing wrong with keeping things low-key and simple until you know whether the class is going to repay a more significant investment in infrastructure.

Deciding Length and Format

As I mentioned in my discussion of different types of classes, there are definitely some lengths that work better than others. A two-hour webinar is probably half-an-hour too long; a three-day workshop is probably one day too long; a twelve-week online class is probably twice as long as most people will be able to sustain.

That doesn't mean you can't ever have a two-hour webinar or a twelve-week online class. It just means that you should think carefully about what you're expecting from your potential students.

A twelve-session class might work better as a self-paced class, for example. Or maybe it could be broken into two or three different classes. In the past, I've packaged my Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced

Developmental Editing classes together, creating a twelve-week program with a substantial discount for people who purchased all three, and I always scheduled them one after the other. But people could also just enroll in the Beginning class if they wanted, or the Intermediate class if they'd taken the Beginning class at another time, and so on. This made it easy for people to opt for the approach that worked best for them.

You will also want to give some thought to format. Video is of course very popular, and some people prefer it, but writing is a text-based endeavor, so at least some part of your class would probably need to include a text component.

Video is also less accessible than text for individuals with visual and hearing impairments. You would need to provide a transcript of the talk and a text description of the visuals.

Video is also difficult to produce well unless you invest in expensive equipment, and it can't be revised very easily to incorporate new information or to prune away outdated material.

As I mentioned in the "Workshops and Seminars" section, you may also think about producing a PowerPoint presentation, perhaps

that you record as part of the class. Again, the challenge is in the difficulty of updating such materials. A PowerPoint presentation doesn't require as much investment as an actual video, though, where lighting and appearance play such an important role in the finished result.

My Club Ed classes are all text-based, with text-based forums for Q&A. While I know some students might prefer video, that is not a direction I'm planning to go; if a student much prefers video to text instruction, Club Ed is not the right place for them. And that's fine! I don't expect my business to be the perfect match for everyone, and neither should you.

As you consider what your class might look like, think about classes you've taken recently. How long were they? How were they shared? What did you like/didn't like about them? Your own personal tastes aren't the only thing to consider (obviously you should also consider your students) but it's definitely a place to start.

Planning Your Class

Planning a class is what we call curriculum development; that is, a deliberate set of actions you take to organize learning activities to meet defined learning outcomes.

When planning a class, you start with what

you want the student to know when they finish your class—their learning objectives. This is different from what you want to teach them!

Learning objectives typically focus on the student acquiring a specific skill or bit of knowledge. Sometimes they might also focus on an attitude ("sit quietly" or "phrase queries diplomatically and politely") but typically the focus is more on what we might call the takeaway value—the skill or knowledge the student will possess at the end of the class that they did not possess before. The more measurable these objectives are, the better.

Learning Objective Examples

Here are some examples of learning objectives:

- After completing this class, students will be able to identify the difference between a noun and a verb eighty percent of the time on a standardized parts-of-speech test designed for Grade Three.
- After completing this class, students will be able to describe what a "fatal flaw" is when referring to classical tragedy.
- After completing this class, students

will be able to describe what an editorial query is, name its three component parts, and successfully write one for a sample text.

Obviously, most classes have more than one learning objective, and learning objectives build on each other:

- After completing this class, students will be able to distinguish among recommendation queries, explanatory queries, and praise queries.
- After completing this class, students will be able to describe why the instructor hates rhetorical questions in queries and will swear a blood oath never to use them.

Classes typically fail when learning objectives aren't clearly defined by the instructor. Defining them also helps you describe what the class offers when it comes time to market it to students!

You wouldn't put "after completing this class, students will be able to . . " in your course description, but the rest will definitely help inform your class description. So don't shirk this important element—it could easily be the

difference between laughing all the way to the bank and crying at all the time you spent on a pointless endeavor.

Learning Objectives v. the Teacher's Objectives

If you're not familiar with writing learning objectives, it can be easier to start with what you want to teach. However, you need to quickly make the connection to what students will learn.

You might have a worthy aim: "I want to talk about how prevalent racism and sexism are in the publishing industry." We'll call that the teacher's objective. But this does not do anything to engage the student, merely to discourage them. Consider what the student wants to know:

"What you can do about racism and sexism in the publishing industry" is better. It gives the student a role in the proceedings.

If you're an experienced editor, you might have a pet peeve: "Stop using 'literally' when you mean 'figuratively'!" But, again, why should the student care?

If it's not easy to identify the "why should the student care" in a specific way (not just "because writers should care about these things" but because "according to this survey

conducted by Jellybooks, readers stop reading 50% of the time when an author has misused the word 'literally'"), then you may need to look at the topic from another angle.

So Step 1 is to decide what you want to discuss in your class in general terms and Step 2 is to decide why students would want to learn that.

Once you have figured out Step 2, you can begin planning the learning objectives and how you will achieve them. Think about format and length as you do this. For example, if you want to show students how to be their own audiobook narrator, you will probably need to have at least some audio elements. If you want to show students how to write and run a macro, video would be very helpful.

Learning Objectives Inform Format and Length

As you sketch out your plan and start identifying your learning objectives, you'll want to start dividing material into lessons, not unlike the chapters in a book. You may quickly discover early on that you have way more material than you could cover in one four-week class (supposing that this is what you've generally decided on), or not nearly enough to cover in one four-week class.

So, consider how to break the class into several classes or to get less granular with the material. If you don't have enough material, consider whether you've included enough examples or can expand your basic idea somewhat. You may need to turn what you thought was a four-week class into a one-hour webinar.

This is an iterative process that you refine as you go along. But before you begin writing/recording lessons, you should have:

- a list of learning objectives for the class
- a list of lessons outlining each lesson's goals or topic
- a general idea of what activities or assignments you'll include with each lesson.

You will want to work out your reading list (if any) ahead of time.

Should You Sell Classes or Information Products?

Determining what products to sell depends a bit on your goals and your aptitudes. If you don't like public speaking, then workshops, talks, and seminars are probably not going to

be your best choice.

Some of these options are more lucrative than others. A class is always going to command a higher fee than an ebook, but then you can sell a lot more ebooks and spread the word about your editorial work.

So if your goal is to use a product primarily to market yourself, then an ebook is a great choice. They're inexpensive, which makes them easier for a potential client to take a risk on.

They also help the reader get to know you and your approach to your work, which helps them decide whether to trust you with a bigger project.

But if bringing in some additional income is a big reason you want to create a product, then a class is going to be a better way to go. If I want to make $500 from a $5 book, I have to find a hundred people to buy it. If I want to make $500 from a class, I only have to find two or three people (maybe four or five if it's a less expensive self-paced class; maybe just one if it's a more expensive class).

I do a mix of both information products (like this book) and classes, with a strong tendency to favor classes. But that's partly because I have a strong teaching background and I get a lot of satisfaction from it.

Like most choices you'll make in service of your writer-editor career, this one is very personal!

Part Five

Getting Started

Chapter Eighteen: Deciding Where to Begin

Now that you have a sense of what skills various types of writing and editing require, you should have a better idea of what avenues you're interested in pursuing. My overall recommendation is that unless you're interested in doing content writing, the most lucrative freelance work you can do will be editing.

The next step is to take stock of your skills so that you can make a good match between what you currently know how to do and the type of writing and/or editing you'll move into. Remember, what you start with doesn't have to be what you do for the next thirty years. I started out copyediting nonfiction; now I develop novels.

Conduct a Personal Inventory

What skills and experiences do you currently have that you can capitalize on as a freelancer?

Assuming you don't already have a resume

full of staff writing or editing jobs, here are some thoughts on coming up with relevant information to put on your list:

- First, look at your education. This is not the most important selling point for any client, but a degree in English or journalism or linguistics is certainly an indication of an interest in language.
- Next, consider how you've used your skills to help others. Did you edit your college paper? Good ("Newspaper editing experience"). Have you mentored struggling students? Good ("Working with nonfluent speakers and writers is my specialty"). Do you edit your church's Sunday bulletin? Good ("Edit weekly publication for a nonprofit organization").
- Also, think about special skills and experiences you have. When I began editing *ATA World* magazine, I was hired more for my martial arts and writing background than for my editing experience—I'd never edited a magazine before. While that background wouldn't have landed me an interview with the *New York*

Times, let alone an assigning editor gig, it made a good match for *ATA World*. If you can prove your thorough understanding of a certain subject, that can be an effective calling card for specific editing opportunities that crop up from time to time.

- Finally, if you really have nothing right now that relates at all to writing or editing skills, make a list of five or ten things you can do in the next two months to give yourself some credible editing experience. Can you offer to edit a friend's book? Volunteer to gather material for and write your local YMCA's newsletter? Grab an internship at a regional magazine? Get some experience as a critique partner or beta reader?

I strongly recommend editing in the genre you write in or one adjacent to it as this is where most of your knowledge is and where it will accumulate.

Using Current Expertise to Get Started

If your writer-editor career is anything like mine, you'll reinvent yourself more than once. In the beginning, in addition to writing essays

and novels, I wrote nonfiction books, then ghostwrote nonfiction books, then wrote for magazines, then edited a magazine, then became a developmental editor for publishing companies, then became a literary agent, then an EIC for an imprint of a publishing company, then started teaching editing. Now I own a small education company and write novels on the side.

When I first started out, I just wanted to earn money from my writing. I didn't particularly care how. So I wrote a lot of those "Ten Ways to Organize Your Garage" type of articles and books. But that kind of work is harder to get now and a lot less lucrative than it used to be, so it's not the best way to freelance anymore. As I've mentioned, you'd probably need to move into content editing to get well-paid writing work these days.

When I became an editor of the kinds of nonfiction books I'd been writing and made enough money from that to pay the bills, I realized I'd struck gold: my writing and editing mutually reinforced each other. As I worked with more experienced editors, I learned from both a writer and an editor point-of-view. I became a better writer and a better editor.

Eventually I moved into fiction everything

and both aspects of my career (writer and editor) continue to mutually reinforce each other.

This is ideal and the type of approach I encourage everyone interested in pursuing a writer-editor career to take.

I mentioned before that freelancing is hard but when both sides of your career mutually reinforce each other, it becomes easier. You can see that writing, say, self-help articles would also help you understand how to edit them and that editing them would help you learn to write them better.

But this also expands to include topics/subject matter. Early on, I became a subject matter expert in martial arts. I wrote about martial arts, I edited a martial arts magazine, I taught martial arts classes—everything reinforced everything else.

Later, when I was writing romance, I became EIC of a romance imprint/publishing company. Everything I knew about writing romance helped me be a good romance editor.

When you're getting started as a freelancer, it helps to focus on skills, knowledge, and abilities you already have. If you already have subject-matter expertise, this can be a way into a writing-editing career. For example, if you know a lot about internet security, you could

definitely find freelance work as a writer, technical reviewer, and editor for businesses that care about internet security. You might also find opportunities at general business publications by writing, reviewing, and/or editing articles about internet security.

That's one way in. Another way in is to say, "You know what, I write stories about anthropomorphic bunny rabbits and that's where I want my career to focus." In that case, I would say you should take your skills at writing about bunnies and learn to edit the work of other children's writers, edit as a freelancer for publishing companies that put out children's books, and see about writing and editing for magazines/online publications aimed at children.

Of course it's easier to break in the first way (with professional subject-matter experience) because it's always easier to get work (whether a staff job or freelance projects) when you've already done related work. So if you currently have a day job and can find ways to do writing or editing work on your job, that's a great way to get credentials for doing similar work as a freelancer for other businesses.

It's also important to edit in genres you already read. I've heard people talk contemptuously about romance in one breath

and then say they'd like to write a romance to cash in on the popularity of the genre. But that's not going to work. You have to enjoy and understand a genre to write and edit it well. You have to care about it. You can't be contemptuous. So, look at the books you already read. That's where you'll start. The genres you already read and enjoy are the ones you are likely to understand the best, so you'll already know what reader expectations are for the genre and you'll have a clear sense of the genre conventions.

Then identify the types of books you don't have on your bookshelves: these are the genres you shouldn't edit (unless you make an effort to read and understand the genre). For example, I don't read horror so I don't edit it.

Gaining Expertise as You Go

I'm going to assume you have the basic skills to be a competent storyteller (if you're just starting off as a writer, the Club Ed self-paced class Foundations of Storytelling for Writers is a good place to begin).

If you want to add editing to your skillset, you will need to make sure you have the appropriate experience and credentials. The world is full of "editors" whose chief experience is that they wrote a book or they

edited their friend's graduate thesis. Those things are certainly helpful and they're necessary steps on the way but they don't mean you're qualified to edit for pay.

It will also be hard to stand out in a crowd if you don't have anything more solid than that to go on.

I often read Facebook and LinkedIn posts on topics like, "here's how to get an agent" where the author's only expertise is that *they* got an agent. But one person's experience is not transferrable to all people. It's a start, but that's all it is. If you want to talk about how to get an agent, and if you want to guide authors in how to find one themselves, you're going to have to do more than focus on your own personal experience. You're going to have to:

- find out how other authors have gotten their agents
- read what literary agents say about getting an agent
- listen to authors who've tried to get an agent but didn't

Only then will you really have an inkling of what goes into getting an agent.

That's not to discourage you from using what you already know. That's what I *want*

you to do! But I want you to think of your experience as a starting place, not the ending place. Don't let your information rely on a sample size of one.

Expanding Your Thinking

One of my students writes and edits comic books and graphic novels; she makes more money from the editing than from the writing but it's the fact that she does both that makes her good at both. And, the editing provides the income she needs to give herself the time and space to write graphic novels.

An offshoot of this is a colleague who edits table-top role-playing games. She enjoys playing the games and even writes episodes herself, but makes a significant chunk of her income from editing them.

A little bit off the beaten path: You can pursue storytelling for businesses. I've coached one writer who has gone on to sell her storytelling skills to businesses. This is such a great idea! The income she earns from working for businesses (who tend to have much deeper pockets than individuals) she uses to help support her creative work. And then as she gets better at her creative work, she gets better at storytelling for businesses, meaning more clients and more money per client.

Exploration Exercise

Visit five or six freelance writer, editor, or writer-editor websites to see how they describe what they offer to potential clients. You can learn a lot from how a freelancer describes their work. Use keywords like "freelance developmental editor." (You can use the Club Ed directory of editors at developmentaleditors.com to get started.)

As you review these websites, ask yourself:

- Is it easy to understand what they offer to potential clients?
- Is it what you would have expected for that type of work?
- What are specific examples of how their writing or editing is described?
- What are similarities and differences among them?

This is a great way to get a basic idea of what freelancers do and how they market themselves.

Chapter Nineteen: Making Money with Your Writer-Editor Career

As I said at the beginning of all this, the goal is for you to use your writing knowledge to create a flexible freelance writer-editor career that allows you to reach your writing goals and also keep a roof over your head.

To do this, you need to make money from your skills, and to do that, you have to know what to charge.

Indeed, this is the most common question freelancers ask me, right after "Where do I find clients?" (which we'll get to in a minute).

Setting Fees

The answer to "How much should I charge?" ("It depends") is never very satisfying. But setting fees appropriately means the difference between running a profitable writer-editor business and one that doesn't break even. It's the difference between acquiring clients and alienating them. The delicate task of setting fees is part art, part science.

It helps to know the prevailing rate for various editing tasks. Sometimes the prevailing rate for a particular service is $25 - $500 an hour, which isn't very helpful. But for other services, the prevailing rate is a bit more standardized. A publishing house may pay $25 an hour for proofreading (and probably won't expect to get it for much less), but won't be willing to pay more than $50.

Try Googling "Editorial services" + "fees" to find fee schedules on the websites of other freelance editors to see what others are charging for services you plan to offer.

Also, you can consult market rate lists developed by professional organizations. For example, the Editorial Freelancers Association publishes a report that lists a range of rates for a number of different editing services. The rates vary depending on region of the country, your personal experience, and other factors, but quoted ranges can serve as a guideline.

How Much Do You Want to Earn?

Beyond that, setting fees has to do with estimating your own income needs. Many writers think, "Well, I can charge $25 an hour and get enough work to keep me busy 40 hours a week," forgetting that they may need at least $35 an hour to pay their bills.

Start from the position of saying, "I intend to make $x this year" with $x = whatever will pay your rent and keep you in chocolate.

Breaking It Down: The Formula

I want to make $ _____ this year from my writer-editor work.

I intend to work _____ [number of hours] per week x _____ [number of weeks you plan to work] = _____ [total number of hours worked]

Breaking It Down: The Explanation

Make sure the number of hours per week accounts for your unpaid creative work. So, if you have twenty hours a week when you can work and you'd like to spend ten of that on your creative work then you have ten hours for paid work.

Divide the total number of hours worked into the amount of money you plan to make this year. If you plan to make $50,000 this year while working full-time (2,000 hours = 40 hours a week times 50 weeks — you need a little time off during the year!), you need to average $25 per hour. But that's not the end of it.

Because you're self-employed, you have

expenses beyond those an employee has. So even if $50,000 sounds like a fair salary, an employee earning $50,000 per year is actually making a lot more than that.

Consider the expenses a self-employed individual has that an employee doesn't have. For example, a staff editor probably has some minimal benefits, such as:

- Paid vacation
- Paid sick leave
- Some portion of health insurance paid
- The staffer's employer also contributes the employer's matching portion of money to the Social Security Administration. The freelancer must pay this herself.
- The cost of office space, equipment, supplies, and utilities that the freelancer must provide herself.

In addition—and perhaps most importantly—you, as a freelancer, are not going to be billing someone for every one of those 2,000 hours. Some of that time is going to be spent marketing your services, and some is going to be spent buying and learning to use new software programs, and some is going to be spent paying your taxes.

A staff editor doesn't have to drum up business. If she has to learn a new software program, she gets paid while she's learning it. If there isn't a lot to edit, she still gets paid. (Of course, if there isn't a lot to edit for a long time, she gets laid off and perhaps becomes a freelancer herself, but that's another story.)

You, on the other hand, will spend a certain percentage of your time pitching your services to clients and — unfortunately — freelancers don't get paid for the time they spend developing new business. Also, you'll spend time doing administrative work — buying office supplies, waiting on hold for technical support — and that eats up hours for which you can't bill a client.

To your original hourly figure of $25, add at least 100% to cover these costs, creating an adjusted hourly rate. So, above, we calculated that to make $50,000 per year working 2000 hours, we'd have to earn $25 an hour. But to make a comparable amount of money to a staffer, we'd really have to earn $50 per hour. That's a big difference.

As you become more expert and don't have to spend as much time marketing your services and can spend more time doing billable work, you'll find that your $50 an hour nets you a salary more similar to someone making

$60,000 a year or even more.

By the Hour, By the Page/Word or By the Project?

Freelancers are typically paid by the page/word, the project, or the hour. While a client may have a budget range in mind, often it's up to the freelancer to propose a rate for a project. What's in your best interest: proposing an hourly rate, a per page/word rate, or a project rate?

The answer, as in so much about freelancing, is "it depends." Each has benefits and drawbacks.

Hourly Fees

Pros:
- Being paid by the hour means that you'll be compensated for all of the time you spend on a project.

Cons:
- As you become better at editing, it takes you less time to complete a given project, so you actually get paid less for your expertise. If the rate is $50 an hour and a beginner takes three hours and an expert takes two, the beginner makes more money, which hardly seems fair.

Page/Word Fees

Pros:

- You get paid for each page/word you edit, regardless of how long it takes you to edit it.

Cons:

- If it takes a long time to edit each page, you may not be compensated fairly.

Project Fees

Pros:

- You get paid an agreed-upon amount for doing the project no matter how quickly you're able to finish it. Clients like to know that one price will cover the entire cost of editing.

Cons:

- If the project runs into snags, you may spend more time on it then you're being compensated for.

With few exceptions, most of the time you're not going to be able to charge an hourly rate with a careless disregard for how long it takes. The client is going to expect some kind of a cap on the hours. You can't say you think the edit will take ten hours and then charge for a hundred hours. No client would find that acceptable and few would agree to open-ended

charges. And a huge drawback is that as you get better and faster, you earn less money. So, you become a better editor and you earn less!

Per-page and per-word fees suppose that all words are alike, and that is not the case in writing or editing, not by a long shot. Two 80,000-word manuscripts can take far different amounts of time to edit. I've edited some manuscripts of this length in about twenty-five hours. Others have taken me sixty or more.

Similarly, two 1,000-word pieces of content marketing can take vastly different amounts of time to research and write. I've written a 1,000-word blog post in twenty minutes; I've also written one that took more than five hours.

That said, per-page/word fees are reasonable to use when first starting out. You and the client know exactly how much the project will cost without your having to think very hard about it.

I prefer project fees because I can typically earn more money that way and I can adjust the fee to factor in the difficulty of the project or other demands, such as a quick turnaround. A project fee doesn't penalize you for being faster.

But for project fees (and to give a client an idea of how many hours an hourly-fee project may take), you have to know how many hours

a project is likely to take.

The first thing to establish (and this is true regardless of how you'll set your fee) is the client's expectations. Are they looking for a quick proofread, a substantive developmental edit, or a medium copyedit? If you're writing an article, what type of research will be needed? Will you have to interview experts in the subject matter? What's the client's process like? Will a lot of rewriting be required? How much fact-checking must be done? From there you can figure out how much time it will take.

Warning: For editors, I can't emphasize enough how important it is to never give an estimate until you see a sample of the actual work. Frequently, a client will say, "I have an eight-page newsletter that I need for you to copyedit, do you think you could do that?" And of course the answer is yes. Then they come back and say, "Can you get it done by Friday for $150?"

It's a no-win proposition for you to answer that question before you have seen a sample of the actual work. Some copy comes in fairly clean—it doesn't require that much editing. You can see that by reading it. Other copy needs quite a bit of work. You're not going to be able to tell that until you actually take a look. So don't make that estimate until you see

a sample.

For writing projects, I make a similar caveat: look at samples of writing the client has commissioned before. Is it heavily researched? Ask colleagues if they've worked for this company before. What was their process like? Was there a lot of editing? Did approval have to go through several people?

It's Not Just About the Money

When you negotiate the fee for a project with a client, you're always negotiating more than just the price you'll be paid for your work. You'll also be negotiating deadlines, details of the project, number of rounds of editing, and other related items.

Don't forget that these details can be used to raise or lower your fees. If a client wants something done in a rush, you can charge a rush fee to do it. Or you may be willing to discount your fee a bit if they'll agree to hire you to edit all of their monthly newsletters instead of just this one.

Chapter Twenty: Marketing Basics

Knowing how to set fees is all well and good, but you need clients to pay those fees. And if you're just breaking in, it can seem bewildering to figure out where to find them.

Throughout this book, I've shown how to get corporate and publisher work through the use of LOIs, but these businesses will typically expect you to have a little experience. To get that you'll need to work with smaller businesses and perhaps indie authors.

And some people prefer to work only with indie authors. In that case, you have to find some!

Find a Friend

To help ease the intimidation factor, you may want to join freelancing groups, especially those devoted to editorial matters, such as the Club Ed membership group or the Editorial Freelancers Association.

There are also editorial-related job sites, such as The Talent Fairy at ed2010.com that can help you hone your professional skills while

learning about job opportunities.

Building relationships with other writers and editors is a great way to learn the ropes of freelancing.

Baby Steps

Since "toe in the water" can make a lot of sense if "plunge right in" makes you nervous, you may want to start by volunteering to edit an organization's newsletter or bulletin.

In this case, I'm not suggesting you volunteer to edit a business's newsletter, because they should be paying you for that, but perhaps there's a charitable organization or some group you're involved with where that would be a gift you'd be willing to give, and which would be accepted as such.

Having the chance to work on your skills in an environment where your skills are appreciated but where no one will be screaming at you if you make an error is very helpful for the beginning editor!

But you want to get paid, I know. So, where do you begin?

First, review the information in Chapter Five, on building your platform and promoting your books. Many of the same strategies are used to get clients for the editing side of your business.

For example, you'll need a website so that

people can find out more about you. Decide whether you want a writer-editor website or separate websites for your writing work and your editing work.

An editor website should include most of the same things as an author/writer website, but it should also include information about your editorial services. I would also encourage you to say something about your rates (even just a range is fine) so that you don't get a lot of inquiries from people who can't afford to pay more than $100 for an edit.

You'll also probably want to be on social media and to start a newsletter list. This can be the same list as your writer list or it can be a separate list. It's challenging to fill up two newsletters (one is hard enough) but because your audiences will be somewhat different (as a writer you're looking for readers and as an editor you're looking for writer clients), an all-in-one newsletter might feel a little jumbled.

My recommendation is to keep it simple at first and add complexity (two different newsletters) only when it's obvious that you need to.

Referrals

These days, almost all of my editing clients are repeat customers, or obtained through

referrals. That is, Colleague A will hear that Company B is looking for an editor and will mention my name. Then either Colleague A or Company B will get in touch with me and let me know about the opportunity, and I trot out the dog-and-pony show.

How do I get these referrals? I ask my friends and colleagues to let me know about projects they hear about. It's how I've gotten most of my most lucrative clients and how I landed a gig as an EIC of a publishing imprint.

Just as important, I do the same thing for my colleagues, and I do it relentlessly. Someone has a project I can't take on? I don't just say, "Sorry, no can do," but I give them the name and contact information of someone who can. The next time that person hears about any opportunity, you can bet they will think about me. Give if you hope to get.

You don't have any writing friends or colleagues? You don't have any leads to pass along? You need to get hooked in, my friend. And that means networking.

Networking

Networking, in the form that actually works, is not about schmoozing people and handing out your business card to anyone who will stand still long enough to take it. It is

simply getting to know people. That's not so hard, is it?

How can you get to know people? Social media is a start. Set up an account on Threads or Bluesky. Search for writers and editors and start following them. See what they post about. Post about similar things. Post links to articles they may find interesting or useful.

If you don't really like either option, try Facebook or LinkedIn. Don't overcomplicate this process. People who do are completely missing the point. It's about connecting authentically with others, not about selling. The connecting comes first; then the referrals will follow. However, don't be afraid to ask for help. An occasional, "I'm looking for a few editing clients" is absolutely fine. So is asking questions: "I'd like to target a certain kind of client, namely newer writers of thrillers. Any ideas for where to find them?"

Referrals and networking are crucial for finding indie authors.

It's important to be where authors are, so consider getting the word out about yourself. You can do that in different ways:

- Teach a workshop
- Give a talk at a conference or writers' group meeting

- Attend a professional association meeting
- Send out an email newsletter with good content

The main thing is to have a clear idea of who your target audience is and to figure out where you can find them. A romance writer probably isn't hanging out in the same place as an academic author.

Identifying Your Potential Clients

I just mentioned having a clear idea of who your target audience is, and your likely response is "I don't know the answer to that." In Chapter Sixteen, I talked about exploring who you are as an editor, identifying what types of clients are underserved, and figuring out what types of clients you already work with as a way to determine who might buy your information products. Obviously those ideas can be expanded to include any type of writing or editing client.

But I want to dig deeper into the question of who you are as an editor and/or writer because it is in figuring this out and niching down that you'll find the most success.

It might be a simple connection between what you do and who you do it for. For

example, suppose you say "I specialize in the developmental editing of mystery, thriller, and suspense. I am flexible and work with all kinds of clients, beginners and more experienced." Then your potential clients are "people who write mystery, thriller, and suspense."

That's one of the most straightforward connections possible between you and potential clients: now you just need to go where these authors hang out (and there are plenty of Facebook groups, writers' organizations, and conferences where you can find them).

But you may not be that focused on genre. Maybe you copyedit all kinds of fiction genres. Maybe you're more focused on coaching basic storytelling techniques and genre doesn't matter as much.

In a situation like that, you need to identify specific details of your audience that can help you pinpoint where to find them.

I work with a lot of authors who are professional nonfiction writers trying their hand at fiction. I find many of them in one specific place, a membership group for professional nonfiction writers. But suppose I want to get more of these types of clients. Instead of one client a month, I want three or four clients a month. There isn't really a

conference I can attend geared toward nonfiction writers who are writing novels. But I could try to find other groups of nonfiction writers and see if any of the members are interested in writing novels. That might work.

Consider Different Ways to Describe Your Potential Clients

Or, I could step back and see if there's another way I could describe my potential clients. Instead of saying "I help professional nonfiction writers try their hand at writing fiction," I could say, "My audience is professional journalists committed to learning the techniques of fiction to tell their stories."

You can see that this automatically suggests a lot of possible places where I could hang out and find this audience. There actually is at least one conference for writers interested in narrative nonfiction storytelling, plus there are writers' organizations that cater to journalists. I can find a bunch of LinkedIn and Facebook groups intended for this audience.

Once I started hanging out in those places, I could talk about using fiction techniques and even about writing fiction, and see if I could make some connections. Beyond that, I might wind up branching out to editing narrative nonfiction for journalists, showing them how

to use fiction techniques more effectively in their nonfiction work. The existence of conferences on this subject suggests that it matters to these writers, so that's a good sign that I'm thinking realistically.

My point is that you may have to adjust your services in order to find enough clients to fill your schedule. It may be that there are enough professional nonfiction writers who want to try their hand at writing fiction that I could be busy for every day of my life, but if I can't find them then it doesn't matter that they exist. Or it might be the finding them is too costly and time-consuming. So, tweaking my audience and my services slightly can solve the problem.

Where's the Money?

Other than the stumbling block of "If I can't figure out where these people hang out, I can't market to them," another reason you might want to adjust your audience has to do with getting paid.

Suppose you love helping emerging writers find their voices. As a former high school teacher, you decide that working with teens would be a natural place to start, and so you would like to start coaching teen writers at the library. You know exactly where to find the

library and also you have a good sense of where you might find teen writers — at the local high school. And you have some former colleagues there, so you could ask them to spread the word about your services.

But before you do that, the question you must ask yourself is, "Can this clientele pay a fair market value for my services?" Because if the answer is no, you don't have a business, you have a hobby. Or, possibly a nonprofit organization funded by arts grants but that is outside my realm of expertise so let's just assume you're as profit-motivated as I am.

Teens writing novels don't have any money to spend on your services. Their parents might but it is doubtful that they would dig very deep or very often. So while this could be a nice gig you do on the side because you love to see fifteen-year-olds realize they have potential, you'll have to revisit your purpose insofar as profit motive is concerned.

What other emerging writers could afford your services? Who else might want to learn to tell stories? What about retirees interested in the legacy they are leaving? "Legacy" isn't just about their estate. Maybe they want to share what they know or give their children a better sense of what their lives were like.

Retirees are much more likely to have

disposable income and be willing to spend it on something as important to them as the story they want to leave behind.

Can you think of where you might find these potential clients? The senior center, the Osher Institute, next door?

Niches and Specialization

Often beginning freelancers will come to me saying they're not sure how to get clients. They're willing to do just about anything for just about any price to get things rolling, so where can they find someone who needs a writer or an editor or a writer-editor?

The answer is everywhere and nowhere, or, more specifically, I have no idea.

The reason why freelancing in a niche or area of specialization matters isn't because you get really good at editing in that niche and therefore outshine the competition (although that is an added benefit), it's because you need to figure out where to find clients. It quickly becomes overwhelming to try to convince everyone that you can edit anything.

That doesn't mean you have to stick with a specific niche forever. As I mentioned above, you may need to adjust for one reason or another. You can add other niches as you go along, so that once you've established a stream

of romance novelist clients you can start adding in mystery author clients. Or you can change your perception of who your audience is when it turns out that although you're trying to market to cybersecurity experts all your clients are hard science fiction novelists.

The more you can pinpoint exactly who your ideal clients are, the easier it is to find them and let them know what your fees are for helping them out. That's why I'm a big fan of niches. It's not that there's something magical about a niche. It's that without one there are a million possibilities. Where do you start?

If you can identify a niche like, "I'm going to help indie thriller writers write thrilling stories," you can see that your first step is to figure out where thriller writers hang out so that you can say hello. If you don't already know, that's a thing you can find out. By the same token, you can say, "I want to help publishers of academic materials produce seminal texts." Again, if you don't already know where to find publishers of academic materials, you can readily find out.

Defining your niche and your audience just gives you something to wrap your mind around when it comes time to spreading the word about what you do.

Speaking to Potential Clients' Problems

While getting very clear on what niche(s) you want to work in is essential, focusing only on yourself can lead to a cardinal error many freelancers make in marketing: talking only about themselves and their credentials: "I've earned a certificate from This Program and That Program and have edited for Big Publisher and Other Big Publisher and some of my indie clients are Popular Name and Popular Name."

An author in search of an editor or an editor in search of a writer doesn't care about your credentials per se; the potential client cares about whether you can help them solve a problem they have. If all they see is a wall of text about how you're so awesome, what they're not seeing is how you can help them.

As I mentioned in the coaching chapter, I used to tell writers that I offered coaching and basically what I said was, "I have a lot of experience with coaching writers, and if you need a coach, I can help!" And as I told you in that chapter, almost no one ever took me up on that offer.

But when I started to get specific about the type of coaching I could do, I started getting more bookings. I would say things like, "I can review your query letter." It was specific and

writers could easily decide if it was something they needed.

As I became more marketing savvy, I began to emphasize the problem that I could solve, not just the specific service I offered. When I began to put the writer/author first, suddenly I had a huge uptick in bookings.

Here's how I revised my approach:

- Are you trying to find an agent? I can provide feedback on your query letter based on my experience as a literary agent and an EIC.
- Are you struggling to make your characters seem true-to-life? Having difficulty figuring out what comes next in your plot? I can show you how to solve plot or characterization problems in the novel you're writing now.
- Would you like to be writing but feel stuck? I can help you get unstuck when you can't seem to figure out what happens next.
- Have you gotten rejection letters but struggle to understand how to turn this information into a revision plan? I can interpret rejection letters so that you can understand where your manuscript is not hitting the mark with agents.

- Are you working on a revision but afraid of wasting time going in the wrong direction? I can review your revision chapter-by-chapter to make sure you're staying on the right track.

An author needs to feel you get them, that you understand their problems and can help them solve their problems. If you communicate that, *then* they'll look for your credentials to support their decision to pick you.

That's right, most clients decide to pick you before they even know what your credentials are. That's because there's something about how you present yourself that makes them feel you can solve their problems. The more intentional you are about that "something" the better.

What are their problems? This is where hanging out with authors and other potential clients can really help. Sometimes what we guess is a problem isn't what actually stops authors (or isn't a problem they would pay anyone to help them solve). Sometimes we think problems we have are the same problems everyone else has and that turns out not to be true. Listen, ask, learn.

Where to Find Potential Clients

The reason to find a niche or two is because it helps you target your marketing, making it something achievable. But even if you have a niche, such as editing science fiction and fantasy, you can get scattered by trying to do too many things.

It is better to focus on a few marketing efforts consistently and persistently than to do a bunch of things very superficially. It's hard to get much traction anywhere if you visit fifteen different Facebook groups a day and make a two-sentence flyby posting before skating off to the next thing.

Going where the writers are is a fairly obvious strategy for an aspiring editor, but you do have to be careful in choosing *which* place. For example, I've seen Facebook groups that have forty or fifty thousand members. The likelihood that you'll connect with anyone or that your engagement will make much difference in a situation like this is very low.

Imagine going to a football stadium full of people and yelling about your work. You'll get about the same amount of attention in one of those enormous Facebook groups.

So, think more strategically. Select smaller groups and try them out. You want to make sure that you feel welcome and that the group

is made up of writers who might entertain the idea of paying an editor for their help. (A lot of these groups seem to exist to support the idea that an author can successfully self-publish without paying for any kind of help at all.)

Free groups like Facebook groups can be a reasonable place to start but they're also filled with beginners who won't ever be ready to hire a professional.

That's why I prefer groups where writers have established that they'll pay something for the benefit of belonging. This is a sign that they consider themselves professional or at least concerned with becoming professional.

So, writers' organizations can be a good place to start. These often have chapters where you can get to know everyone a little more personally, and almost all of them also have online forums where you can get to know people who live beyond the local area.

Most organizations have an associate membership option that covers people who aren't writers but are in allied fields, like editing or publicity. Check this out before you join.

If you're a writer as well as an editor, you can join in either capacity, but be aware that associate memberships, though typically less expensive, also tend to restrict how much input

you can have over the organization (for example, you may not have voting rights or may not be able to serve on the board). This may or may not matter to you if your primary goal is to find clients.

Be aware that being too obvious about your marketing can get you booted from these organizations, so focus more on establishing your credentials ("As an editor, I've seen this problem before and what I typically suggest is . . .") than on selling yourself ("Hire me to ghostwrite your book!!!").

I'm also a big fan of attending conferences. Now that many conferences have a virtual or hybrid option, you don't even have to leave your living room to attend. (I do encourage in-person attendance where possible, as it is much easier to make an impact in person versus online.)

This is about immersing yourself in a milieu versus walking away with three new clients after the conference ends. You'll learn a lot about what matters to authors, what kinds of information they're getting from other people, and how you might fit into their world.

One way to defray the expense of attending a conference is to propose speaking at it; you can sometimes get all expenses paid plus a speaking fee (though this typically requires

you to have some experience as a speaker). Note that the speaker lineup is typically decided well in advance, so start looking into this at least nine months in advance of the conference.

You'll make a better match if you think of who you are as an editor in comparison to what the writers' group identifies as who their members are. Nonfiction academic authors are unlikely to be congregating in the same place as romance writers and if you're a science fiction and fantasy editor, neither place is probably where you should be.

It's common early in your career to not have a perfectly defined clientele, so I recommend just starting somewhere in order to limit the endless number of possibilities.

Once you've identified places where your clients can be found, I recommend creating a specific plan for interacting with them (notice I said "interacting with" not "marketing to").

For example, will you attend the monthly chapter meetings in person each month? Will you update your directory profile every six months? Will you engage with three writers' posts in that Facebook group every day?

Put this stuff on your calendar and your to-do list. Don't just promise yourself, "I'll get involved with that local writers' group."

Determine what you'll actually do—and then do it!

Letting Clients Find You

If it sounds like finding clients can be a lot of work, you're right. It is. It can also be very, very frustrating. You can spend a lot of time connecting with potential clients who never actually hire you.

Wouldn't it be lovely if you could skip all that and just have your clients automatically come to you?

I wish I knew that secret; I would own my own island in the Caribbean.

A lot of freelance editors want this to be possible. They'd love to just have the work fall in their laps without any further effort on their part.

But this kind of thinking—that there must be some easy way to get clients—typically results in editors putting up profiles on sites like Reedsy and getting low-paying work that never becomes better-paying work. The more low-paying work they take on, the less time they have to do anything about how badly the work is paying, in a tedious and heartbreaking treadmill until they get evicted from their apartment and have to do something else.

Or they spend a lot of money on ads that

don't bring in any clients. Or they spend hours a day responding to posts from job directories and never getting picked.

Let me be clear: There's nothing wrong with putting up a profile on sites like Upwork and Reedsy and being selective about any clients that respond, or with running an ad and seeing what happens, or responding to job posts on the chance that you'll get picked. This is especially true when you're first starting out and don't have a lot of work. You can and should put a lot of irons in a lot of fires and see what happens.

The problem is in thinking that all you have to do is put up the profile or run the ad and your marketing problems are solved.

All of these can be *part* of what you do, but they can't be the sum total of what you do.

Related are freelancers who put up a website and think that clients will find them that way and they don't have to do anything else. A website is a must for a freelancer, as it gives people a place to find out more about you, but among all the hundreds of freelancers I know, only one gets the majority of her clients from their finding her website, and that's because she works obsessively on SEO.

This required her to become—and stay!—an SEO expert and create a ton of content that is

necessary to keep her site at the top of search engine results. She didn't just put up a website. She works constantly to make sure that she has content that keeps her website relevant to search engines and to the kinds of keywords her clients are searching for.

While you can do some things that help potential clients find you (have a website, keep a profile on job sites, respond to job postings), you also need to have an active marketing effort that puts you where authors are.

It can seem like a lot at first, but as you put yourself out there more and more, you'll start to see results, and you'll find it easier. It's like learning anything new: at first you're an awkward beginner, but eventually you become a confident virtuoso.

A Final Thought

I hope you've found this walk through the terrain of freelancing informative. And I also hope you've found it inspiring! It's possible to create a freelance career that allows you the time and space to focus on your creative work, as many thousands of writer-editors can attest.

Certainly there will be times when it's challenging, but it's never more challenging than trying to find and keep a staff job that will allow you time to pursue your creative work

and pay enough to keep a roof over your head.

This book is intended to be an overview of how you can put together a sustainable (and profitable!) writer-editor career. Now's the time to dive more deeply into whatever aspects sound most appealing to you and that fit your skills and interests most closely.

I'd love to see you at Club Ed (ClubEdFreelancers.com), but wherever you go next, I hope it's everything you dreamed it would be!

Glossary

An alphabetical list of terms used in this book.

Acquisitions editors represent their publishing company and are the ones who actually offer a contract for a book an author has written.

Advance is the money a publisher pays an author before their book is published. In general, the acquisitions editor plans to pay an advance equal to the amount of royalties — the author's share of profits — that the editor believes the book will earn in six months (in some cases, one year). Since figuring out how many copies a certain title will sell requires a bit of guesswork, and agents push editors for larger advances, often a book doesn't sell enough copies to cover ("earn out") the advance. That is, an author may receive an advance but then never see additional royalties. *See also* royalties.

Agents work as salespeople on behalf of writers. They sell the author's book to a publishing company and earn a commission from the advance and royalties (the standard commission is 15 percent). They protect an author's rights and try to ensure that the author gets favorable contract terms. Generally, they don't edit an author's work, although some will help an author polish their work before shopping it (sending it out to editors).

Artificial Intelligence (AI), machine learning that can duplicate many human tasks. In editing, rules-based editorial roles such as proofreading and copyediting are more vulnerable to being replaced by AI than roles such as line editing and development, which require significant human judgment to perform.

Assignment brief, also called the project brief or creative brief, summarizes (thus "brief") the deliverables and expectations of a project.

Assistant editors work with acquisitions editors and may or may not have decision-making clout.

Beta read, feedback from a reader (not necessarily one with any specific skill or knowledge) who has read the full manuscript and reacts to what they've read.

Book doctoring, a service that goes far beyond editing into actually rewriting the manuscript (whether fiction or nonfiction).

Book formatter, one who prepares a book file for publication, typically referring to ebooks as they require special preparation. Those who format print books are often called book designers or layout designers.

Book packager, a service company that provides editorial, layout, and cover design support to a traditional publisher, often for licensed content. *See also* licensed content.

Book proposal, a type of sales document that describes the intended content of a nonfiction book, the author's credentials for writing it, an analysis of competing titles, the author's intended marketing and promotional efforts, and a sample chapter or two.

Brand style, *see* house style.

CE memo, copyediting memo, describes details the copy editor needs to know before they begin their work, such as editorial decisions already made, typically generated by the developmental editor.

Class planning, *see* curriculum development.

Clip(s), examples of previously published work (generally used regarding articles and similar content, not books).

Coaching for writers is anything that helps writers write better stories that isn't the finite act of reading a manuscript and giving feedback on it, and could include everything from brainstorming to accountability to problem-solving.

Coauthoring, writing a book with someone else, with both authors getting cover credit. Usually coauthor pairs include a subject-matter expert and a writer, but they can be two experts, if both experts are competent writers. *See also* ghostwriting.

Content editors, *see* developmental editors.

Content writing, often called content marketing writing, is sponsored writing (that is, the organization being written about is paying the writer to do it) that can be seen all over the internet from companies—blog posts, articles, website content of all kinds, social media posts, and so on.

Copyediting, *see* copy editors.

Copy editors (CEs) work at the sentence-level and ensure the manuscript conforms to the accepted style.

Creative brief, *see* assignment brief.

Critique is a reader reaction. The reader says how they have experienced the manuscript and leaves it up to the author to decide what, if anything, to do about it. Obviously, a critique could be more than/different from that, but it's the basic process most follow when critiquing peer-to-peer. In practice, we often hear this kind of critique called a "beta read." *See also* beta read.

Curriculum development, also known as class planning, is a deliberate set of actions you take

to organize learning activities to meet defined learning outcomes.

Custom publication, a periodical (whether print or online) intended for an audience of a specific business, organization, or association, and sponsored by that organization.

Developmental editing, *see* developmental editors.

Developmental editors (DEs), also called content editors, story editors, or substantive editors, work at the big-picture level. Does the manuscript do what it's supposed to do? The developmental editor may also perform basic fact-checking and will be expected to catch discrepancies such as the protagonist who has blue eyes in the first chapter but brown eyes in the second.

Domain name, the overall name of a website, like www.JenniferLawler.com; a URL, uniform resource locator, is just one page on a website, such as [www.JenniferLawler.com/blog.](www.JenniferLawler.com/blog)

Ebook, a book that exists in electronic format, such as can be read on a Kindle.

Edit committee, a group of publishing company employees that typically includes the publisher or their designee, other editors, and members of the sales and marketing team, who collectively make decisions about what books to publish.

Edit letter *or* **editorial letter**, *see* revision letter.

Edit plan, sometimes called a transmittal memo or manuscript review form, a description of the developmental problems an editor (typically a developmental editor) has identified in a manuscript and the methods and tools they'll use to solve them.

Editorial assistants read the "slush" (manuscripts no one is very excited about) and make the coffee, but someday hope to run the company.

Editorial pass, one complete read-through of a manuscript, during which an editor looks for and addresses specific problems. For example, a copy editor may make one pass through the manuscript looking for formatting errors, and one pass looking for punctuation errors. Editors take several passes through a

manuscript before completing the edit or editorial round. *See also* editorial round.

Editorial queries, comments on the manuscript itself describing problems and how the editor has addressed them or how the author could address them during the revision.

Editorial round, a complete edit of a manuscript focusing on one aspect of editing, such as development, copyediting, or proofreading. An editor may go through the manuscript several times to complete one round of editing. Some manuscripts require more than one round of any particular editorial type, with an author's revision in between. Not to be mistaken for an editorial pass. *See also* editorial pass.

Editors-at-large, editors usually brought on by a publisher because they have a specific skill or reputation to contribute. They rarely deal with day-to-day operations and are usually not on staff. As a freelance editor, you will rarely work with an editor-at-large but you may *be* an editor-at-large.

Editors-in-chiefs oversee the entire editing function of the publishing company. They may

acquire books but their main role is management.

Email list, a collection of email addresses (obtained with the owner's permission) that you can use to communicate with prospective (and actual) clients. Typically used to send a regular newsletter, so it's also called a newsletter list.

Epub is a type of file format for ebooks. *See also* ebook.

Executive editors oversee the entire editing function of a publishing imprint. *See also* publishing imprint.

Features are human interest pieces.

Galley, sometimes galley proof or proof, typically a PDF of the laid-out book exactly as it is intended to be published.

Ghostwriting is actually writing a book (whether fiction or nonfiction) for another person, who publishes it under their name. This is common in fields like celebrity memoir. *See also* coauthoring.

House style, guidelines regarding grammar, punctuation, and formatting unique to a particular publishing company or other organization. For corporations, this is sometimes called the brand style. *See also* style guide.

Hybrid publisher, a publishing company that provides editorial support and cover design for authors; authors pay all the costs of production (unlike traditional publishing). Hybrid publishers can be somewhat selective in which works they publish (for example, maybe they only publish a certain genre, or don't publish manuscripts that contain graphic violence).

Hybrid publishing sometimes refers to a situation where an author self-publishes some works and publishes others with a traditional publisher. *See also* hybrid publisher.

Indie authors, authors who are either self-publishing or want editorial help before they attempt to land an agent and a traditional publishing contract.

Instructor-led classes have an instructor component, may include specific times when

everyone in the class meets for an in-person or virtual session, and typically include customized instructor feedback on student assignments.

ISBN, international standard book number, a unique identifier required for books that are sold at any retailer; Bowker is the organization that issues them.

Lead magnet, *see* premium.

Learning management system (LMS), a type of software that organizes material for classes that can be accessed by students, instructors, and administrators.

Letter of Introduction (LOI), a letter that describes your skills to potential clients.

Licensed content is copyrighted or trademarked material being legally used by a third-party. An author with a publishing contract with a traditional publishing company is licensing their content to the publishing company. The publishing company doesn't own it, but does have permission to publish it. In publishing "licensed content" often refers to well-known media (like

Superman) or brands (like Disney) that are allowing the publisher to produce a book based on the media/brand. A Disney-branded alphabet book, for example, would use Disney characters in the illustrations but Disney itself may not be the publisher. If they've given permission to, say, Simon & Schuster, then S&S is the publisher and earns a share of the income but the licensed content itself (the Disney illustrations) still belongs to Disney.

Line editing, *see* line editors.

Line editors (LEs) polish authors' prose by doing more sentence-level editing than a copy editor typically does. Line editing can also be done at the DE level if the overall story is in reasonable shape and won't require significant rewriting. An in-demand service among indie authors, not a separate editorial role in traditional publishing.

Managing editors, more often found in periodical publishing than in book publishing, may perform many of the same roles as the acquisitions editor. In some cases, the managing editor functions more like a copy editor. In book publishing, managing editors tend to play a role similar to executive editor

and may have editors reporting to them. Sometimes they will be more like a production editor. In any case, they will almost always be on staff.

Manuscript, abbreviated ms or mss (for plural), any piece of writing in its non-published form.

Manuscript assessment (sometimes called manuscript evaluation**)**, using a revision letter alone to outline the developmental needs of a manuscript.

Manuscript review form, *see* edit plan.

Marketing, strategies individuals and organizations take to build awareness about their products and services. Marketing can include paid strategies, such as running an ad; it can include social media engagement; it can include content marketing (writing blog posts and the like); and many other possibilities. *See also* promotion.

Narrative nonfiction, a type of nonfiction that uses storytelling techniques to communicate an argument, idea, or information.

Newsletter list, *see* email list

Pass, *see* editorial pass.

Pitch letter, *see* query letter.

Pitch session, an opportunity to describe your book to an editor or agent in a one-on-one session, typically at a conference but sometimes online/virtually.

Platform, built-in access to an audience. If an author has a lot of subscribers to their YouTube channel, that's a platform. If they have an extensive email list, that's a platform. If they run a podcast with a thousand listeners, that's a platform.

Premium, also called a lead magnet, an offer made to induce potential clients to sign up for an email list. *See also* email list.

Print-on-demand book (POD), a print book, typically paperback, that is printed at the time a sale is made, not printed ahead of time for shipping to retail outlets.

Production editors route the book through the editing and design stage and resolve problems

in the production process (whether print or digital or both). The author is unlikely to have much contact with production editors.

Profile, an article that provides an in-depth look at a particular individual who is notable for some reason.

Project brief, *see* assignment brief.

Promotion, a specific strategy used in order to build awareness of a product or service. The terms marketing and promotion are often used interchangeably by nonexperts. Sometimes a specific promotion is referred to as "a promotion," like running a Facebook ad for two weeks ("I'm running a promotion this week.") In that case, the Facebook ad might be part of a larger marketing strategy of using ads to build awareness about a product or service. *See also* marketing.

Proof, *see* galley.

Proofediting refers to proofreading a manuscript and doing more than just correcting egregious errors. It also includes light copyediting, such as to ensure consistency across the manuscript.

Proofreaders (PRs), whom many people confuse with copy editors, go through a manuscript before it is published to make sure that no errors have slipped through after editing. A proofreader may compare a final typeset work against its copyedited draft to make sure the changes were accurately reflected in the final. This work requires an excellent eye for detail. It is also something that many if not most publishers farm out to freelancers.

Proofreading, *see* proofreaders.

Publication date, the date when a book is officially available for sale at all retail outlets. In traditional publication, this is typically a Tuesday.

Publisher is a term used loosely to refer to both the person who has the title of publisher and to the publishing company as a whole. The person who is the publisher is basically the boss. They are mostly involved in the financial end of the operation—making sure sales are good and revenue is flowing. They usually have the final say on editorial decisions, but they don't generally acquire books.

Publishing imprint, one part or branch of a publishing company that typically publishes a certain type or genre of book. For example, Avon is the romance imprint under the larger umbrella of HarperCollins Publishers.

Queries, *see* editorial queries *and* query letters.

Query letter describes the work that an author is seeking to publish, often sent to an agent for representation. Also called a pitch letter.

Revision letter, sometimes called an edit letter or editorial letter, a document highlighting the editor's main concerns with the manuscript and advising the author of various ways to fix these problems.

Round, *see* editorial round.

Royalties, the amount the author receives per book sold, traditionally a percentage of the cover price of the book but now commonly a percentage of the net price of the book (what the publisher sells the book to a retailer for). Royalties tend to be graduated, with higher percentages for hard cover (perhaps ten percent) and the lowest percentages for mass

market books (five percent). Mass market books are the 5x7 paperback books you find at Walmart, the grocery store, and the book store. Trade paperbacks are of varying sizes; the royalty rate for these is usually somewhere between hard cover and mass market. Ebook royalties are higher, often thirty percent or more.

Running head, the information at the top of the page that gives the book title, the chapter title, and/or the author's last name.

Sales funnel, a way to move prospects (that is, potential clients) from low-priced or no-cost products or services (such as a blog post or an inexpensive ebook) to high-end products or services (such as an expensive class or editing or coaching package).

Sales mosaic, a term I invented to mean offering different products at different prices that clients may be interested in purchasing, but not stacking them in a specific order as one would do with a sales funnel. *See also* sales funnel.

Self-paced classes are classes designed to be completed at the leisure of the purchaser,

typically with no deadlines and no instructor involvement.

Self-publishing is writing, designing, producing, and making a book available to the reading public using resources paid for by the author rather than another party such as a publishing company.

Seminar, in-person or virtual/online, typically covers a significant amount of material in a compressed amount of time. The term "workshop" implies a hands-on component though seminars can have them, too. Seminars tend to be held for small groups of learners, not dozens or hundreds of people.

Sensitivity reading helps authors writing manuscripts where disability, mental health problems, sexual orientation, gender identity, race/ethnicity, and so on are involved, avoid misunderstanding and misrepresenting what these life experiences are like.

Series bible, a document describing the content of previous books/ installments in a series, including characters, settings, and so on, with the editorial decisions that have previously been made regarding spelling of

words and so on. Basically, the house style for a particular series of books. *See also* house style.

Service pieces are how-to and self-help articles.

SEO, search-engine optimization, a way to direct online searchers to find specific information on your website. An editor would want to include SEO that would attract writers looking for an editor.

Story editors, *see* developmental editors.

Style sheet, describes the style choices made by the copy editor.

Style guide, a collection of accepted principles for grammar, punctuation, formatting, and other matters related to consistently presenting a manuscript (for book publishing, this is typically *The Chicago Manual of Style*)

Substantive editors, *see* developmental editors.

Synopsis, basically a two-or-three page summary of who's who, what happens, and why in a novel.

Technical reviewer, a subject-matter expert who reviews a manuscript to make sure it is generally accurate regarding factual information in the subject matter

Theme (e.g. theme of a website), governs the appearance and basic functionality of a website.

Trade publication, a periodical intended for an audience of people who work in a specific industry, such as automotive.

Traditional publishing refers to producing a book for the general public to read where all production and related expenses are paid by the publishing company, not the author. The author is paid royalties for the right to publish their book and generally pays no expenses. Since publishing companies are highly selective in the manuscripts they choose for publication, it's difficult for most writers to access traditional publication.

Transmittal memo, *see* edit plan.

URL, uniform resource locator, one page of a website. *See also* domain name.

Vanity presses/vanity publishers, similar to hybrid publishers in that the author pays the costs of production, but hybrid publishers are different (to a degree) in that hybrid publishers don't use scare tactics or pretend they're doing things they're not doing. Vanity publishers accept any manuscript that lands in their inbox and they try to pretend things that aren't true (that they can make a book a bestseller, etc.) *See also* hybrid publishers.

Webinar, an online video presentation that can be offered live ("Join me Wednesday, August 8th, at 7 pm Eastern time") or as a recorded, on-demand class ("Watch anytime!").

Workshop, in-person or virtual/online, typically covers a significant amount of material in a compressed amount of time. The term "workshop" implies a hands-on component though seminars can have them, too. Often the hands-on component is done in breakout groups.

Writers' guidelines, basic instructions for submitting work to a publishing company, magazine, or other organization that purchases writing.

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About the Author

Jennifer Lawler founded Club Ed®, LLC one bleak winter on the Kansas prairies, dreaming of blue skies and sunshine. Some months later, she packed up *The Chicago Manual of Style*, numerous cartons of books, and a couple of pairs of cut-offs and moved to Southern California, where most days she can be found at the beach, laptop in hand, surrounded by palm trees and bougainvillea.

Jennifer became a freelancer more than twenty years ago, when her daughter was born with a serious, debilitating neurological disorder and she needed a way to pay the rent that didn't require going to someone else's office for forty hours a week.

Over the years, she's met hundreds of other people in similar situations, and freelancing has helped many of them pay the bills while also dealing with other responsibilities and demands. Her goal is for Club Ed to help anyone turn a way with words into a realistic source of income.

She has worked for many years as a

freelance book development editor on a wide range of editorial projects for traditional book publishers as well as independent authors, specializing in genre fiction.

She launched Crimson Romance for Adams Media (which became an imprint of Simon & Schuster), overseeing all aspects of acquisitions, editorial, and production. She has also worked as a magazine editor for MSP Custom Publishing. Previously she worked as a literary agent.

She teaches aspiring and established story development editors the craft of developmental editing as well as the business of freelancing, primarily through Club Ed. She also develops and offers expert instruction in more advanced theories of editing, such as her classes in POV problems and conflict.

She is the author or coauthor of more than thirty nonfiction books and nearly twenty novels, including her popular and award-winning Dojo Wisdom series (Penguin). Her work has been published by Simon & Schuster, Thomas & Mercer, Montlake Romance, and others.

Her personal essays have appeared in publications such as *Family Circle*, *Neurology Now*, *Minnesota Monthly*, and the Chicken Soup book series. Her blog post, "For Jessica,"

went viral and is still a source of comfort and inspiration for parents of children with special needs.

She has taught in the biomedical writing program at the University of the Sciences in Philadelphia, the copyediting program at the University of California – San Diego, and in professional development programs at the Editorial Freelancers Association and Loft Literary (among others) as well as at other writing programs in colleges and universities.

She earned her PhD in medieval English literature from the University of Kansas and a black belt in Taekwondo at approximately the same time. She hasn't quite decided which has been more helpful in her career.

You might also like Jennifer's *The Club Ed Guide to Starting and Running a Profitable Freelance Editing Business*.