

2016

Lucid Prose, Good Timing, Happy Authors: Steps Toward Successful Editorial Production

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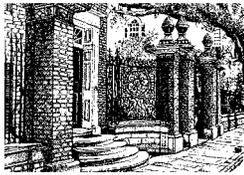
Weinreb, Jenya (2016) "Lucid Prose, Good Timing, Happy Authors: Steps Toward Successful Editorial Production," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 28: Iss. 6, Article 10.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.7556>

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Lucid Prose, Good Timing, Happy Authors: Steps Toward Successful Editorial Production

by **Jenya Weinreb** (Managing Editor, Yale University Press) <jenya.weinreb@yale.edu>

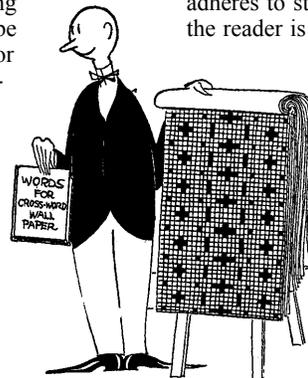
At university presses, the “editorial” part of an Editorial, Design, and Production (EDP) group is often known as manuscript editorial, to distinguish it from acquisitions editorial. If the acquisitions editor can be considered the architect of the publishing process, the press’ in-house production editor (or “project manager” or “manuscript editor”) is the general contractor, supervising freelance copyeditors, proofreaders, and indexers and working closely with the author through the various stages of book production. The production editor may also copyedit or proofread — although that work is more often outsourced — and must have an eye for detail while implementing the big picture of the project’s production schedule and publishing plan.

Copyediting can be a scary prospect for authors, who envision their pristine files redlined into oblivion and marred by picky notes about split infinitives. But a professional copyeditor is a manuscript’s “home improvement expert,” who smoothes out blemishes and brings out the book’s best features. Copyediting, at its best, achieves three goals: clarity, consistency, and grammatical correctness. The most important is clarity. The purpose of copyediting is to en-

sure that authors have communicated what they wish to say and have not been unintentionally misleading or funny or ambiguous. Having someone scrutinize the manuscript, line by line, and query confusing reasoning or unclear word choice can be invaluable. One grateful author devoted half his acknowledgments section to his copyeditor (the other half went to peer reviewers): “I thank ... Robin DuBlanc for perfectly superb editing and the ability to detect incoherence.”¹ It’s not even that Robin *fixed* incoherence; it’s that she pointed it out so the author could address it.

Copyeditors and production editors are not tasked with fact checking (that’s the responsibility of the authors, aided by peer reviewers), but they are alert and informed readers. A reference to “National Security Adviser George McBundy” prompts them to look up the name and insert a correction: it’s McGeorge Bundy. And copyeditors do impose consistency and grammatical

correctness, both in the service of clarity: if there are no inexplicable variations in names, terms, dates, citations, or other elements to mar the reader’s experience and if the grammar adheres to standards for formal writing, then the reader is more likely to trust the author’s words and expertise.



The copyedited manuscript is shared with the author, who reviews the suggestions and answers queries. The final decision about wording is always the author’s, but most find that copyediting makes their books better. They acknowledge copyeditors whose “keen attention to detail was remarkable” and whose “careful corrections and

smart suggestions were invaluable.” One commented, “Where the sentences flow, and logic follows, you will experience [my editor’s] mark on the book.”²

After the author returns the reviewed manuscript, the files are “cleaned up” — tracked

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changes are accepted and any loose ends resolved. The production editor checks to make sure all the various elements of the manuscript match each other. Do the note numbers in the text agree with the note numbers in the endnotes? Does the table of contents match the chapter titles? Do the captions refer to the correct illustrations? If a figure, table, or quotation is taken from another source, does the author have permission, and is appropriate credit given?

In addition, the files are readied for typesetting. Every element of the manuscript — the basic text, chapter titles, epigraphs, subheads, block quotations, lists, endnotes, illustration captions, and so on — must be identified and tagged. The book's designer provides "specifications" for each element so the typesetter can make it look the desired way.

The typesetter formats the manuscript, creating "page proofs," or "first pages," which show the design and pagination of the print edition, with illustrations and tables in place. Now that the page numbers are set, the index can be assembled. At the same time the author, and sometimes a professional proofreader as well, can read the entire book and mark errors that need fixing. This is the last chance to correct facts, dates, and names. For example, in a book of biblical studies, Esau's father was identified as Jacob rather than Isaac; the proofreader caught the error and queried the author. The proofreader may also flag inconsistencies missed in the copyediting stage: "In the text it reads 'wife,' but she was described as his mistress in note 11." Although such mistakes can be fixed, the layout is now final and indexing is under way, so any additions to the proofs have to be compensated for by deletions of the same length, just as deletions have to be compensated for by additions.

The main reason to read page proofs is not to catch previously overlooked errors but to identify any *new* errors that occurred during typesetting. In our computer age, the text isn't retyped, so typos don't usually creep in as they used to in the days of hot metal, but there can be

technical glitches involving fonts (especially if the book contains non-Latin alphabets or other special characters), unanticipated issues with layout, and inconsistencies among elements that need to match.

Production editors are trained to be on the lookout for such problems. The production editor reviews the author's changes carefully, collates them with the proofreader's, reviews and edits the index, and ensures that every necessary change is correctly implemented. The production editor also reviews jacket copy and blurbs, and proofs and reproofs the designed jacket. In the process of all this review, the production editor may detect errors that no one else has found. In one set of page proofs, a figure caption read, in part, "Three graphs with progressively decreasing density, from left to right." But the production editor noticed that the three graphs were not placed side by side but were stacked from top to bottom, and the highest-density figure was in the middle, not on top. She alerted the authors, who reordered the caption and reordered the graphs.

Every editor can tell a story about a mistake (usually a misspelled proper name, like Georg Lukács spelled "Lukács" or Bill McKibben spelled "McKibbin") missed by author, copyeditor, and proofreader but found by the production editor right before the book went to press. At the end of the revision process, the book may not be perfect, but it will be as close as professional eyes can make it.

As the book is readied for printing, the eBook files are also prepared, in ways that vary somewhat among university presses. Usually the process is largely automated, but the files for the eBook formats — Kindle, iBook, universal pdf — may need to be checked by a human to fix conversion glitches. For example, **Yale University Press** uses an eBook vendor whose conversion process automatically inserts links to other chapters in the book: if an author writes "See chapter 2," the reader can click that link in the eBook and go right to the new chapter. But with at least one book in the field of biblical criticism, most of the references to "chapter" were actually to the Bible, not to the eBook in hand. The links needed to be found and removed.

All this checking — of the text, the illustrations, the jacket, the laid-out pages, and so on — takes a lot of time, and therefore money. Our authors relish the attention to detail and feel that the time is well spent, but we wonder how the process could be streamlined. One way would be to produce fewer formats. If a book were neither printed nor made available as a "fixed-format" (pdf) file, there would be no need for page proofs as we know them. We could go from copyedited, cleaned-up manuscript to a reflowable-format eBook. Conversely, if a book were available only in print, we could eliminate the steps of eBook conversion and quality control. It's more likely, though, that multiple formats will continue to be useful and requested, so perhaps it's the software that will evolve, to allow for smoother conversion between the various fixed and reflowable book formats. There will still be a need for skilled production editors to ensure that changes appropriate to each format are properly implemented.

In this future scenario, as in our current landscape, the three components of the ideal editorial process will be quality, timing, and author relations. A high standard of quality means copyediting that, above all, does not compromise the author's intent or style but improves the book's clarity, consistency, and correctness; and it means project management that involves catching mistakes and not inserting new errors at any stage. Quality standards must be met while adhering to a schedule that accords with the project's publishing needs. Is the author doing fieldwork in Ghana without an Internet connection for three months? The production editor will find a way to get the book done in time for the right academic conference, while attending to twenty or so other projects, each with its own constraints. Maintaining quality and keeping to a schedule are impossible, however, without the cooperation of the author, which is why developing the best possible relations with authors is paramount. Establishing trust and good communication requires care, tact, judgment, and sensitivity. Working closely with authors to negotiate schedules, revisions in proof, design issues, and every aspect of the book's production may take as much time and skill as copyediting or proofreading. If upon a book's publication the authors feel, as one told her production editor, that they have partnered with a "team of intrepid editors, whose work makes us look better than we are," then our goal is achieved. 🍇

gument *are* the research product" (emphasis added). Adopting a one-size-fits-all approach to "scholarly articles," as an increasing number of universities are doing in establishing OA policies, seems problematic to me.

The impacts of technological developments on scholarly publishing have been enormous (one need only compare a mail room today with one from thirty years ago for a striking, pragmatic example). And every library and publisher I speak with now acknowledges that,

as revolutionary as Open Access has been, it won't completely supplant other means of dissemination. As we move forward, exploring new models, I remain convinced that the sifting and winnowing—what others have called the "gatekeeping" role of academic publishers — remains central. Yes, perhaps this will cause a given manuscript to be delayed in reaching its audience. But the urgency of speed of publication is different for articles on Zika research compared to an analysis of Chaucer's description of the astrolabe. Besides, not everyone appears on *Jeopardy!* the first time they try out. 🍇

Endnotes

1. **Jerome Kagan**, *On Being Human* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), p. xiv.
2. **Zara Anishanslin**, *Portrait of a Woman in Silk: Hidden Histories of the British Atlantic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), pp. 408–9; **Alon Tal**, *The Land Is Full: Addressing Overpopulation in Israel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), p. xxiii; **Max Page**, *Why Preservation Matters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), pp. x–xi.