



HANSON WRITING & EDITING

805.546.9009

*Professional editorial services
for every client*

Nels Hanson
hanson@fix.net

Vicki Hanson
veh@impulse.net

Preparing for Publication: From Draft to Printed Page

by Vicki Hanson

*Self-expression must pass into communication for its fulfillment.
- Pearl S. Buck*

Yesterday's stereotype of the struggling writer — alone at a typewriter, crumpling pages in despair, ripping up rejection slips — has been updated: Computers have streamlined the act of writing, workshops encourage writers to share their efforts, and publishing manuals crowd bookstore shelves. Indeed, if you've been penning a family history, drafting a travel article, or assembling a cookbook, you may already be dreaming about publication as you hit the final period on your keyboard.

The simple fact, however, is that you're only halfway home: "Final" drafts require editing — that rigorous but vital labor that orders and clarifies, bridging the writer's desire for expression and the reader's need to understand. There's no avoiding this last step, whether you're a promising novice or a veteran author.

If you're not a practiced writer — even if you're an expert in your field — you should always seek editing on two levels: substantive (structure and clarity) and stylistic (form, grammar, and punctuation). Even the most compelling topics require clear development in concise, effective language.

If you're a seasoned writer, you'll revise your own work through several drafts before asking other professionals to provide feedback regarding content (scientists and other academics follow this practice, known as "peer review," before submitting papers to journals). If you're diligent, you'll also submit your writing to an experienced copyeditor: In my 30-plus years of editing I've never met a manuscript that was error-free. (F. Scott Fitzgerald, a master re-writer and critic of his own work, was a notoriously bad speller.)

Writers who plan to submit a book to an agent or publisher know that they face tremendous competition and that the minimum requirement for being taken seriously is a manuscript formatted to industry standards. Even if you decide to work directly with a local printer and self-publish, you will need to provide a "camera-ready" layout as a PDF ("portable document format").



Throughout our writing and teaching careers, my husband, Nels, and I have edited each other's work (including this article) and that of university students, professors, and administrators; research scientists; lawyers and judges; and organizational and corporate executives. We also help private clients prepare book manuscripts for submission to agents and publishers or for self-publication. In all our projects—no matter the subject area or the writer's level of expertise—our goal is always to ease the way for the reader in four primary areas:

- (1) *Organization*: Emphasizing main ideas supported by concrete examples and using parallel structure and terms for parallel ideas
- (2) *Language*: Clarifying expression and ensuring a consistent "voice" that the reader "hears" while reading, no matter how technical or informal the subject
- (3) *Style*: Checking for consistent terminology and form and correcting grammar and punctuation. (Computer spelling and grammar checks don't always catch typos or improve sentence structure.)
- (4) *Formatting*: Using consistent titles, headings, margins, fonts. (If the editor is acting as liaison between the author and a designer or printer, this step also includes creating the PDF, proofreading layouts, and reviewing printers' proofs.)

Clients will sometimes ask us for only one kind of editing—usually copyediting or layout proofing. The truth is that there's no way to separate the four editing functions listed above. A good editor will be aware of all four while marking text, even if he or she makes separate editing passes to address them—beware of editors who are happy to "just copyedit." Also, design and printing costs are increased when an editor is brought in at a later stage: Proofreading *always* means editing, and editing *always* alters the layout.

Organizations and individuals alike sometimes question the value of hiring editors. Businesses may be willing to pay top fees for graphic design but consider editing a luxury, not understanding that the authority of their brand or the impact of their Web page is diminished by poorly written copy. Individuals may have budget constraints or worry that the project they hold dear will be taken over by the editor. But in all cases one maxim holds true: A skilled editor is always a sensitive reader/writer who focuses and strengthens the author's intent.

If you do contract with an editor, be sure you have a written agreement with all services spelled out (scope of work, delivery date, final format, etc.). Avoid editors who charge exorbitant fees or very low fees—either extreme should raise a red flag. Reputable editors charge fair prices for their work, frequently negotiating discounts for large jobs. In particular, be wary of editors who prey on aspiring authors. There are many "editing agencies," especially online, that advertise ghostwriters and book doctors who vow to make a project marketable (an impossible pledge, given the vagaries of today's publishing industry).

Writing anything—an interesting freelance article, a persuasive public relations piece, an evocative memoir—requires effort and patience. When you've done your very best and printed out your last clean page, find an editor whose skills you trust and with whom you can work comfortably. Your edited manuscript will be polished and professional and say exactly what you want it to say—in print. ◆



For more information on the full range of editing services offered by Hanson Writing & Editing, please contact Vicki Hanson at veh@impulse.com or call her at 546-9009.



Nels and Vicki Hanson help writers prepare a variety of manuscripts for publication and printing. (Photo by Sally Marks)