

How to Pick the Right Editor for Your Book Report #116

When you choose an editor, you have to be both objective and subjective. First I will discuss the objective part; later I'll address the subjective part of making your decision.

How to be Objective

I edit book-length manuscripts and have an excellent track record and happy clients; nevertheless, I hear horror stories about people who chose the wrong editor. Each sad story represents lost time, lost money, and an end product that reflects poorly on the author. When I ask what made the unhappy author choose a particular editor, I almost always get one of two objective answers: "He had the lowest price" or "She could turn it around quickly." Price and turnaround time are uppermost in the minds of most buyers of editing services, yet they should be the *least* important, because they are the most short-lived and shortsighted.

Think objectively about it. When you buy a pair of shoes, you can pay \$10 or \$100, but the \$100 shoes will have higher quality. As a result, they fit better, last longer, and are more stylish and current. Along the same lines, you can find low-priced editors, but they are editors who won't deliver a high-quality product. With low-priced editing services you hire people who either don't value their own work or don't have much experience. Some editing services even use high school and college students willing to work for a pittance because they have little or no experience.

In choosing an editor, low price and fast turnaround both work against you. The best editors charge for their experience, spend a great deal of time with each manuscript, and have a backlog of work. To get the right editor, be patient and be willing to pay, because you will get what you pay for, and you'll be rewarded with a good editing job. As a result your books will reflect well on you and sell well, too.

Price and turnaround time are just the beginning, though, when you are looking for an editor. You need to find out more.

To determine if the person you are considering is a reputable editor, research that editor's name on the Internet by using Google or Bing to see what other sites on the Internet are saying about him or her.

Talk to that editor by e-mail or phone or read a list of that editor's edited books to find out if the person has an understanding of the type of book you have written. For example, if the book is self-help, your editor should be a reader of self-help books and should have a history of editing such books. If the book is a thriller, fantasy, science-fiction, or romance, the same holds true.

Your research still needs to go a few steps further before you make a decision. Here are a few other things to check:

1. Is the editor a full-time editor who doesn't have another job that detracts from editing? (Many folks who list themselves as editors have "day" jobs doing something else.)

2. Has the editor edited books that have been published by traditional publishers, not just by self-published authors? (Don't let an editor say that information is proprietary. It's true we do not disclose the titles or contents of manuscripts that are not yet published, but the titles of published books are not subject to nondisclosure.)
3. Has the editor written or contributed to books that have been traditionally published, not just self-published? (While this point is not essential, it does indicate the editor has good credentials.)
4. Has the editor been editing in general for at least a decade?
5. Has the editor been editing books in particular for at least five years?
6. Is the editor willing to supply you with a list of recent clients, along with contact information, so you can check references? (If the editor says that information is proprietary, it means the editor has no references. Clients' projects are subject to nondisclosure, but clients' names should never be a secret.)
7. Does the editor have a Web site listing accomplishments, services, and prices? (If an editor won't list prices, it could mean surprises later. You need to know what you are getting into.)
8. Does the editor offer follow-up guidance and mentoring and allow you to ask questions afterward? (If no personal contact is allowed, you could be dealing with a service that hires young, inexperienced people.)
9. Does the editor, if you request it, include a report on elements such as organization, clarity, and marketability? (Such a report is considered concept editing, book doctoring, or developmental editing and, if the editor offers it, often comes at a higher price than line editing, which simply repairs grammar and punctuation errors but does not address the elements of the book. You may not want such a report and want only line editing, but you must know what you are getting before you agree to work with an editor.)

When the editor you find fills the above requirements, you can know that your decision is an objective one, based on the most important facts, rather than based only on low price or fast turnaround.

Ah, but you still have to choose an editor you feel comfortable working with. Now comes the subjective part.

How to be Subjective

We get gut feelings for a reason, and those are the subjective things we need to tune into. Quite often after a first meeting or phone call we have a sense about whether we will get along with that person. Here are some things to think about to help you make a subjective decision about your potential editor:

1. While talking with an editor, if you feel apprehensive for any reason, examine what's going through your mind and why you don't feel quite as comfortable as you'd like. Trust the small voice inside you if it says something is wrong. Move on to the next editor on your list.
2. If your potential editor gives you a sales pitch, keeps trying to make you commit right away, or offers you a discount if you act immediately, run! You're dealing with a skilled salesperson, not a skilled editor. As for me, I am a low-key person. If you decide I'm right for you, you'll let me know. I don't push. Most good editors will be the same way.

3. If you have any sort of miscommunication with your potential editor and it isn't resolved immediately to your satisfaction, you may be dealing with someone who doesn't fit your personality. Move on.
4. If you get a sample edit from an editor who tells you what you did wrong, instead of telling you what could be improved in your writing, that person is critiquing you, rather than your writing. When an editor critiques the writer, rather than the writing, it makes a writer feel less adequate. Move on to an editor who evaluates your writing, rather than you.
5. If anything at all gives you any sort of uneasy feeling about your potential editor, examine it, ask the editor about it, and discuss it. If it isn't resolved to your liking, move on to the next editor on your list.

When you choose an editor using both objective and subjective methods, you will be happy with the results, no matter how long you wait or what price you pay.

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