Five Extraordinary Editing Tasks

Turns out that an editor can do a lot more than edit

AFTER THEIR MEETING, THE MANAGER HAD A lot to consider. The team leader gave the manager the copy of *The Levels of Edit*§ to review. Much of what the team said was clearly articulated in this booklet.

And to the manager's delight, much more. The additional information would make life easier as they embarked on a measurable program of incorporating an editor into their process. Already the manager could envision a professional editor making their project studies, resource plans, technical reports, and

business proposals easier to read and understand, and thus more readily accepted and adopted.

The section entitled "The Condition of the Manuscript" garnered these insights:

♦ The effort required for any level of edit directly relates to the condition of a manuscript. Better prepared manuscripts require less effort; poorer ones require more effort.

♦ The condition of the manuscript directly affects the budget and schedule.

♦ The level of edit defines the quality of the final document, but not the effort required to attain that quality.

All these insights help predict the time and effort required of an editor, regardless of the level of editing involved. While assessing the actual amount of

§ *The Levels of Edit*, by Robert Van Buren and Mary Fran Buehler, published by the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), California Institute of Technology, Second Edition. See April 2012's blog post for details.

time creates a bit more work upfront, it clarifies the scheduling and budgeting for a project.

A final section described five extraordinary functions that an editor could perform whenever necessary. This, the manager found enlightening because there had been circumstances in the past when an editor could have helped out in many of these areas.

1. Add missing information. Sometimes team members were inundated and could use an editor to expand on their technical input and to research various points. Once the basic information or outline was provided, an editor could:

♦ Research and write to expand on foundational information.

♦ Create figures and tables to summarize and encapsulate data.

♦ Create examples that provided a story to complicated information.

♦ Collect information from related publications to give the original authors a perspective on their data and provide a reference point for making decisions.

In other words, thought the manager, take an idea or concept and develop it further.

2. Edit difficult material. An editor can:

♦ Edit and rewrite text written by someone for whom English is a second language and who is not as familiar with expressions, idioms, and just the simple flow of sentences.

♦ Edit text translated from a foreign language and turn it into readable English.

♦ Edit transcribed text. Now there is a novel idea the manager had never considered. Team members could dictate their ideas (for instance, while they traveled), which could be transcribed by a service; then an editor could have at it.

♦ Take handwritten notes and turn them into cogent text.

3. Handle multiple iterations. There were many instances when a document went through a number of cycles. An editor could keep track of all those changes, and ensure those changes were im-

plemented correctly and in the proper order. This is especially true for summary tables and explanatory figures.

4. Edit technical content. Many projects, especially reports, plans, and studies, involved multiple authors. An editor can:

♦ Combine the contributions from these many authors, and smooth any varying style issues to create a consistent tone and voice.

♦ Rewrite and revise to organize the document into a cogent flow.

♦ Ensure that redundant technical information is eliminated and gaps are filled.

♦ Verify the accuracy of technical content.

♦ Identify and correct inconsistencies, such as terminology, names, symbols, and phrasing.

5. Perform unusual services. This function explained a plethora of tasks for an editor to perform.

♦ Deal directly with more than one author, without having to involve the project manager.

♦ Handle incremental input and intelligently incorporate and organize it.

♦ Deal with remote authors, especially those in different time zones.

♦ Interview authors and subject matter experts to garner information required to complete a project.

The manager could think of one other extraordinary task for an editor: to act as the focal point for the written aspect of a project. When an editor managed all aspects of the document, including scheduling and timelines, others would be free to concentrate on the technical information. Incorporating such extraordinary editorial functions would certainly push the final document toward a more human connection. 🌑

—RICH MAGGIANI