JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT YOU WERE DONE—A PRODUCTION PRIMER FOR AUTHORS

Copy-Editor Competence: An Authors' Quest(ionnaire)

Third in a Series/Part 2

By Lillian R. Rodberg, ELS TAA #640

Lillian R. Rodberg, ELS, heads The Manuscript Doctors in Emmaus, Pennsylvania. She has taught publishing courses at Lehigh County Community College and Cedar Crest College. She and her partner, Nancy Hopkins, were among the pioneers in achieving certification in life sciences editing from the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences in May 1991.

Part 2

Lowering the Flag Quotient

Far too many flags are necessitated by reference inconsistencies. Tedious as it may be to write down names and dates and all publishing information while in the throes of writing, it is far more tedious to have to backtrack for the information. Writing queries like "AU: Barnes or Burnes, see Bib" takes time the CE could better devote to remembering that on page 50 you described the subjects of the experiment as toddlers aged 3 and on page 387 you described them as aged 3 to 5. (Yes, CEs remember things like that.)

Highlighted terms that are not in the glossary are another fruitful source of queries. (Midnight oil-burning CEs tempted to think "this is a careful author; could I skip cross-checking chapter 69?" eschew temptation only to find that the author was tired, too, and *none* of the terms for chapter 69 is in the glossary.)

As for other matters, by saving the CE time and grief you can save yourself aggravation, too. Moreover, you ensure that whatever the copyediting budget is, most of it will go to the most important CE functions: reader's advocate, author's insurance. See the box.

Going over the copyedited ms.

and answering queries will take much longer than first-timers expect (or AEs lead them to believe). Reserve uninterrupted time for this task and try to forestall the mind-numbing, timeconsuming task. Remember, too, the CE is going on with the edit while you are going over the first batch, so if a problem appears, pick up the phone!

Hasn't the Computer Eliminated All this Nonsense?

Yes and no. I was tempted to leave it at that, but feel it only fair to expand a bit on the topic.

The computer can make sure words are spelled correctly (at least according to the word processor's built-in dictionary, (which may not be the one prescribed by "house style"). It cannot tell when you said "to" and meant "too," "of" and meant "or" (a very common typo), "that" and meant "than" (another favorite). It cannot tell that Burnes and not Barnes conducted the study you are citing, and in 1982, not 1892. It certainly can't spot that discrepancy about the toddlers, or notice that you absentmindedly typed "the outcome was a false-negative" when you meant "false-positive."

Even the highly promoted grammar programs do not seem to spot subject/verb disagreement in complex sentences. Or items in the summary that are no longer in the

chapter. Or items in the chapter that are not in the summary and should be. Or that the name of a disease has changed while you were writing. Or that the song title is "I Heard It Through [not "on"] the Grapevine." Enough?

Moreover, if your manuscript has been done on disk with embedded codes, the CE has a whole new set of things to look for, namely, that codes for italic are "closed" so that the whole chapter will not be set in italic. Things like that. The codes also tend to interfere with visualizing the final result—for author and editor alike.

Keeping the Lines Open

Usually I call an author a week or so after sending a batch of manuscript out. It's another chance to get feedback. Some authors really "get into" queries, and a spirited dialogue develops in that medium too. Dialogue with the author has an invigorating effect in a job that has many tedious aspects and, for freelancers, is often conducted in isolation to boot. Frankly, with authors who are unforthcoming, my interest tends to wane a bit. With authors who both contend and appreciate, dedication zooms and the midnight oil burns.

How is query dialogue conducted? Publishers' practices vary here too. Ideally, the manuscript with its answered queries comes back to the CE for "cleanup"—that is, it's the CE who reads each response, notes any queries not responded to for a phone call if complex or "carry to proof" if simple, and incorporates your responses into the manuscript proper. The manuscript then becomes a permanent record of your responses and the CE's decisions. In some instances it may even become a legal record. For example, in most medical manuscripts, dosages are queried routinely, and the author must initial to confirm them.

In one widely publicized case, a "trade" book by a TV "sex expert" was printed with infertile and fertile phases of the menstrual cycle reversed. Cost of the recall was in

GETTING YOUR COPY-EDITING BUDGET'S WORTH

I think fewer authors would ignore these guidelines (which most publishers provide) if they were aware of the reasons. Herewith, ways to help your CE keep her attention on what really matters: content. Remember, and remind your word-processing person, that unlike a dissertation or a student handout, a ms. is raw material for someone else to put into the form the reader will see.

- Doublespace EVERYTHING: Text, tables, and most especially references. **Reason:** Many marks pertaining to typography will have to be inserted. Reference style is especially subject to changes and transpositions. The CE needs room.
- Leave wide margins: ideally 1.5 inches all round. **Reason:** CEs and PEs need margins for table and figure callouts, typecoding, and those all-important queries to you. Although most typesetters can read inscriptions small enough for the head of a pin, they'd rather not.
- Don't play designer: Resist the temptation to use your WP's bells and whistles. For italics, use underlines. In subheadings, use NO underlines unless italics are mandatory, for example, for genus and species. **Reason:** The CE will have to write tedious instructions to the compositor to ignore (or observe) your italics and to delete or re-mark items for which the designer's instructions or house style differ.
- Keep all elements separate: Don't run tables, boxes, or drawings into the text proper. Designate where they are to go and put them at the end with separate numbers for each element (T2-1, T2-2, F-1, F-2, etc.) **Reason:** These elements are typeset separately from the text, often by a different person. Usually, figure captions are best typed separately, not on the figures themselves, for the same reason.
- Don't rule tables except (1) between column headings and table body and (2) at the bottom. **Reason:** It will take your typist an inordinate amount of time to put them in and your CE time to take them out. Trust me. Exception: matrix cells and the like.
- Be generous in changing ribbons on your printer. If you think "it'll do," it won't. **Reason:** You don't really need one, do you? CEs suffering eyestrain run to testy queries. Squinting typesetters run to typos.
- Don't write on the copy-edited ms. That said, if you absolutely must insert something instead of using a flag or a separate sheet, do it in a bright color different from what the CE used and mark (with a 3M flag or whatever) every place where you have made a change. **Reason:** Insertions have to be edited. Yes--they do; 9.5 out of 10 authors insert style inconsistencies as well as misspellings and grammatical errors, often pertaining to something before or after the insertion. (Rodberg poll.)
- Don't erase or cross out the edit. Write "stet" (or if feelings run high, "stet!" and put little dots under the lines you want reinstated--like this. **Reason:** See above. Also, the ms. should be a permanent record of CE changes and your responses. If you insisted on being wrong (or at least different), the CE should not later be blamed.
- Retain your sense of humor. **Reason:** As in all life's endeavors, it helps.

five figures. A query record would establish whose error this was. (An editor versed in things medical would certainly have queried this.)

The CE may call during the "cleanup" to resolve unanswered queries or to fine-tune certain changes ("sex vs. gender" went almost to the wire). Now that author and CE know each other, a Mss. Dr. also suggests (subtly, I hope) that she do the index, but that's another article. The CE then sends the edited manuscript back to the production editor, and the typesetter will take over. For me, the conclusion of a copy edit is like any parting—a little sad: time for a Snickers bar and a cup of hot tea. But perhaps the author and I will meet again during indexing and, if both of us have done our part, when it's time for another book or the next edition.

Now, About Aristotle . . .

If you feel you've just been reading fiction, it's time to get more involved in your copy edits. This is a service your publisher provides, and you should make the most of it. While talking terms for your next book, ask some questions:

- What system does the publisher use to qualify CEs? Many "editing tests" are all but worthless.
- What does your publisher pay CEs?
- Will the publisher agree to hire a freelancer you've been happy with elsewhere?

About qualifications: copy-editing "tests" range from single pages containing simple errors (which CEs hate because there is no context) to whole chapters (which take often-unpaid-for time that a heavily booked—and therefore probably competent—CE isn't likely to have). For life sciences CEs, the recently inaugurated BELS certification program, requiring 2 years' experience and a rigorous 3-hour exam, is a welcome credential. (A diplomate program is in the works, too.) Beyond that, take a careful look at your CE's resume and list of projects completed. Membership in professional organizations (Council of Biology Editors, Society for Technical Communications, American Medical Writers Association, Editorial Freelancers' Association, and, of course, TAA) signals a professional approach. An alert CE will accompany her resume with recommendations from peers in your discipline. No matter what it says on paper, though, *insist that you see a sample chapter.*

About pay: There are publishers out there paying $10 an hour and expecting CEs to edit 10 pages in that hour. No one can do a thorough job at that pace. Many textbook publishers pay by the edited page. If their rate for a first edition is less than $3 a page, they will not attract the best talent. Even $3 a page generally works out to $15 or at most $18 an hour—hardly munificent. It is in your interest to promote both better pay and stringent qualification of CEs. No—it won't break the bank. An increase of $1 a page on a 1000-page manuscript divided by sales of 10,000 books is: you figure it out. Moreover, better editing saves production money later.

Last, when you find a CE you work well with, latch on. (This may take some persistence.) Those CE-bashing articles always bewail the loss of one "jewel" of an exception but offer no evidence that the complainer made the slightest effort to hold on to that jewel. At Chicago I found most authors don't know they have any choice. If your textbook is doing well, you have power.

Use it. Bargain for choice. Bargain for that sample chapter. Be armed with your knowledge of the few cents per copy competence costs the publisher.

And acknowledge your jewel in print, to the PE, and to the AE. Being regularly called a cretin-by-profession makes on positively Pavlovian in rewarding praise with effort.

One last note: Try to enjoy your CE collaboration. It can be fun. Well, almost.

Next time: The index. After which you really will be done, and so will I.

FROM THE EDITOR GROUP

Ed. Note: In each issue of TAA Report we try to publish something from and for each special interest group. For this issue we drew a blank—a situation with which editors can surely sympathize—no copy. This is a request for copy for future issues, and while you're thinking about the newsletter and the group, how about suggesting some possible names for that group?

Suggested Reading

American Psychological Association *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 3rd edition. Hyattsville, MD: American Psychological Association, 1983. The clearest, most helpful style manual going. Grammar and usage are based on *Chicago*. Worth buying and consulting even if psychology is not your discipline.

Bernstein, Theodore. *The Careful Writer.* New York: Atheneum, 1965. Best of all the guides addressing that vs. which, ensure/assure/insure, and all the rest. Alphabetically arranged, entertaining, even witty. Keep a copy in the bathroom and read a section a session.

Bridgewater, William. Copy editing. In: Gerald Gross (ed): *Editors on Editing.* Revised edition. New York: Harper & Row, 1985. How it's done by one who did it.

Cheney, Theodore A. Rees. *Getting the Words Right: How to Revise, Edit, and Rewrite.* Illuminating guide to succinctness for authors and editors alike.