The Match Game: Finding the Right Editor

By Barbara McNichol

Setting out to find the right editor for your manuscript puts you on the road to feeling confident you’ve got a good match. You want to feel comfortable that your editor understands what you’ve set out to accomplish so you can “polish” it together.

To help in your search for find the right editor, get ready for a checklist of questions that a potential editor could ask you.

**Checklist of Questions to Ask**

Your answers to these questions give a professional editor a better understanding of your project and help you both make a match in heaven. How would you answer these questions?

- Who is in your book’s target audience (demographics, age group, position, industry, region, etc.)?
- What genre or market niche does your book fall in? What section would it be found in a bookstore?
- What is your expected editorial timeline (e.g., when did you promise to give it to an agent or designer, or have it ready for a conference, etc.) allowing time for your review, peer reviews, and a professional editor’s review?
- How much of your book is written? Have you finished all the content you want including front and back matter (e.g., foreword, testimonials, acknowledgments, dedication, footnotes, resource list, glossary, appendix, etc.)? If your answer is not 100%, what is missing? When would you be ready to send your complete content?
- What is the current length of your book before editing? (number of pages and/or number of words in an MS Word document)
- What is the anticipated total length, including front and back matter?
- If you want to have a foreword, have you asked someone to write it and provided a deadline for delivering it?
- How much are you expecting to spend on having your book professionally edited (excluding proofreading after the design)?
- What else do should the editor know about your expectations so he or she can do a really good job for you?

An editor who asks these types of questions shows eagerness to understand your project and get on the same page. It sets up a discussion that gives you a sense of how you’d work together.
Here’s one of the most important questions: “Is the manuscript 100% content-complete?”

If you answer “yes,” you can expect a solid project price and an estimated timeline. If it’s “no,” your manuscript is likely a candidate for a manuscript review. This analysis evaluates the ideas and wording to provide direction for changes you’d make before it’s deemed content-complete.

**The All-Important Sample Edit**

How do you start to find the right editor for your manuscript? The obvious: Ask your writer and designer friends, check acknowledgments in books you like and contact the editor listed, and search the Internet for editors in your genre and in your area. Then request a sample edit of your work—especially if more than one editor is in the running for your business.

Writers and editors aren’t exactly in a dating relationship, but you want a good match here. If an editor works magic on your writing but you don’t agree with the approach or the kinds of changes made, it’s good to discuss them up front so you both can adjust. Some authors (mostly new ones in my experience) fall in love with every word and find it painful to see their prose change. That’s why discussions help a lot.

A rule of thumb: If you, the writer, can clearly see an improvement from the editor’s work, if you recognize that the words flow better and your writing has more clarity and pizzazz, that’s a green light. If you don’t agree with the changes or find yourself arguing with them, that’s an amber light. Time to talk.

**Put Your Best Foot Forward**

But (always the but), remember your intent. You want to put your best foot forward and not give an agent or publisher reason to turn down your manuscript for sloppy, unpolished writing. As Chris Roerden, author of the book, *Don’t Murder Your Mystery*, says, “An automatic way to murder your chances of getting your manuscript published is to come across as an amateur writer.” You rarely find the words “amateur” and “accepted” in the same sentence.

Yes, locating an editor who’s the right match for you requires effort to make sure you’re comfortable with the editor’s approach. Ultimately, you want your editor to be the advocate of those you want to reach—the pro who makes it easier for your readers to connect with you and your message.

*Barbara McNichol* (editor@BarbaraMcNichol.com) helps authors perfect their writing through expert editing and her quick-reference guide, *Word Trippers: The Ultimate Source for Choosing the Perfect Word When It Really Matters*, available at [www.BarbaraMcNichol.com](http://www.BarbaraMcNichol.com). She can be reached at 520-615-7910.

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