

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

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?

- Who is in your book's target audience (demographics, position, industry, region, etc.)?
- What genre or market niche does your book fall in? What section would I find it 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?
- Without including back and front matter, 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 matter?
- If you want to have a foreword, have you asked someone to write it and provided a deadline for delivering it?
- Would you like the editor to also do the proofreading after the design/layout phase is complete? This would be in addition to the project fee, and will be included in the proposal.
- How much are you expecting to spend on having your book professionally edited (excluding proofreading after the design)?
- Have you published other books? If so, tell me about them.
- How did you learn about me and who can I thank for a referral?
- What else do I need to know about your expectations so I 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 with you. It sets up a discussion that gives you a sense of how the editor would work with you.

The Most Critical Question of All

Bar none, here's the most important question: "Is the manuscript 100% complete?" If your *content* is 100% complete when you hand it over to the editor, you'll get a solid project price and usually a clear timeline. That doesn't mean you and your editor won't be dealing with changes (there will always be additional questions to answer and so on. But in

an ideal world, your editor deals with your manuscript in two complete passes) the first one that includes corrections, suggestions, and questions for expansion and clarification; the second one to review the changes and polish the wording to a brilliant shine.

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, even look on the Internet for editors in your genre and in your area. But whoever you select in the initial stage, request a “try-before-you-buy” sample edit—especially if more than one editor is in the running for your business. Oh, and this sample needs to be a sample edit of *your* work, not of someone else’s. You want to determine how the editor would handle *your* manuscript.

Writers and editors aren’t in a dating relationship, but you are looking for 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 recognize that up front. Discuss it so you both can adjust. Some writers, mostly *new* writers, fall in love with every word and find it painful to see any change in their prose. That’s why discussions help a lot.

Here’s 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 there’s more clarity and “pop” in the writing, then 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. Editing can and should be a collaborative process.

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.” The words “amateur” and “accepted” rarely find themselves in the same sentence.

Yes, locating the right editor requires effort to make sure you’re comfortable with the editor’s approach and sample edit. I suggest you view your editor as the advocate of both you and the reader, the pro who makes it easier for the reader to connect with you *and* your message.

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Contact Barbara today!**

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