



What to Look for in an Editor

Define your project, for yourself and your potential editor

- Decide where you are in the writing process. Is your work finished or still in progress?
- Clarify what kind of editing you'd like for your manuscript. Organizational help with an article? A close reading for language issues in a short story? A kick start to help you shape a memoir from a handful of published and unpublished essays? A full developmental edit of a completed novel, with follow-up consultations on the revisions?
- Think about your budget. Investigate the rates charged for different kinds of editing (see some possible rates at the Editorial Freelancers Association site: <http://www.the-efa.org/res/rates.php>). Some editors charge by the hour and some by the project. Most editors are glad to work with you on setting a budget and deciding what issues are most important to focus on. Editing often happens in stages, which can help with budgeting.
- Is your manuscript a genre work (mystery, romance, science fiction, young adult, fantasy)? How important is it to you that your editor know the field?
- How important is direct contact to you? Would you like to work with a local editor and meet in person or talk several times on the phone? Are you fine with an editorial letter, electronic editing, and an editor who lives elsewhere in the state or country?

Gather information and start looking for editors

- Check with writer friends and writing instructors for recommendations of good editors.
- Check out the website of the premiere organization for editing professionals in the Pacific Northwest, the Northwest Independent Editors Guild (www.edsguild.org). The Guild offers information on types of editing and basic tips for working with an editor. On their site you can browse through an online directory of editors from Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. You can also post a job on the Guild's job board. A similar organization exists in the Bay Area (www.editorsforum.org).
- Look at the website for the Author-Editor Clinic, which is a mentoring project for developmental editors and a resource for writers (www.authoreditorclinic.com). The Clinic offers a manuscript clinic twice a year as well as referrals to experienced editors. Most of the editors live in the Puget Sound area.
- Many freelance editors also have websites, which you can find through online professional directories such as the Northwest Independent Editors Guild.

Contact and interview possible editors

- Contact an editor in plenty of time. Most editors are booked up a month or two in advance; they may have openings in their schedule at the last minute, but you can't always count on that.
- Many editors have information about their editing practice on their website or can send you a page about themselves and how they work. You can use this as a basis for asking questions.
- Decide in advance on the questions you'd like to ask a potential editor after you've described your project. A few examples might be:

How long have you been working as an editor?

Are there areas of writing you specialize in? (Literature, nonfiction, genre writing?)

Are you familiar with my field as an editor and/or reader, and have you edited manuscripts in that field before?

What is your hourly rate?

What can I expect as an author in terms of how we'll work on the manuscript and maintain contact?

Do you offer a written agreement? Do you ask for a deposit?

- If an editor has many years of experience and you sense a strong degree of professionalism in how they present themselves, you may not feel a need to ask for references. If you have any concerns about the editor, you can certainly ask the editor to supply you with the name(s) of other authors they have worked with.
- An editor will also want to interview *you*. The editor may ask for a sample of your work and/or send you a questionnaire of some sort to elicit a thorough description of your project and understand your goals as a writer. This may be followed up by more e-mail correspondence or a phone call. These initial discussions are usually free, but some editors have more time than others to talk or meet in the initial stages.
- Feel free to contact several or more editors until you find one whose schedule is open and seems right for you. But remember that editors have varying degrees of available time to talk to potential clients. The more prepared you are with preliminary questions and the more thought you've put into the material you'd like to send the editor, the more professional your relationship will be from the beginning.

The Author-Editor Clinic

www.authoreditorclinic.com