



Editor's Checklist

By Susan Miller and Kim Pettit

"I didn't sign up to be a project manager," wailed the editor when facing yet another missed deadline. "Just let me work with words!"

An editor might expect to review manuscripts; to perform substantive editing, detailed editing and proofreading; and to work with individual authors on revisions. However, in most publishing houses, editors do much more than just "work with words." They take part in the entire product development process. The process varies from one product to another, let alone from one publishing house to another, but perhaps the following can serve as a useful checklist.

Concept development. Editors evaluate manuscripts and seek authors who have something worthwhile to say, considering the mission, the market, and the future in developing publication plans. They pursue translation rights and explore creative alternatives for acquiring content to new books. Are the projects you choose the right ones to meet the mission and vision of your publishing house?

Project budgeting. What will it cost? Can you afford it? Will the product recover its costs? Is this the most effective way to use limited resources? Do others in your organization agree with your assessments concerning the costs, projected sales, and income for this product?

Assignments. Do you have clear writer's guidelines explaining what you want to see in query letters and book proposals? Do you make clear assignments, including

word/page counts, format required for the text, preferred style, deadlines, and so on? Are your contracts clear? Does every party understand who owns what rights, who decides the title, the cover, and how revisions are accomplished?

Scheduling. Review the projected daily workflow for each project. Allow time for staff to meet standards. Manage the pace at which you work. Look ahead; know what is coming. Look at the process as a whole, not just the step you are working on right now. Are your expectations clear? Are they realistic?

Substantive editing. Are the ideas organized in a way that makes sense to the reader? Are they clear? Is the level of writing right for the intended audience? Are the ideas significant and original? Will they matter to the reader? Is any part superfluous? Is there anything missing that the author should include? Does the book have good transitions from one section to another?

Copyediting and proofreading. Products must meet your company's editorial standards. This includes not only quality in content but in presentation. Check punctuation, grammar, spelling, page numbers, title treatments, design formats, paragraph indentations, fonts, text formatting issues (use of underlining and italics, orphans and widows, bad breaks between lines, missing copy), placement of graphics, photo captions, and so on. Also check the title page, copyright page, front

and back matter, as well as the all-important cover copy and art.

Collaborating. Bringing a product from the manuscript stage to a finished product requires a decision, early in the process, on how you will package the product so as to appeal to the target audience. This means working with marketers, designers, and others involved in print-buying to ensure a realistic budget and schedule is established at the start of a project. It also requires that, once the editor's work is complete, others can take charge of completing their part of the project. An editor wants projects to be completed on time, within budget, and in keeping with the publishing house's standards. Do you have the right staff or outside services for the work that needs to

be done? Are you assigning work in a way that maximizes the strengths of each person involved in the project?

Follow-up. The editor's work does not end when the book goes to press. The author wants to see the book once it is done. The sales team needs information to create advertising and publicity for the book. A book's success may inspire a whole range of new products—and the need to start the process once more. As the Bible says, "Of making many books there is no end." (Ecclesiastes 12:12) Got your checklist ready?

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