

How to pick an editor

When you ask for an editor through a professional organisation, you might feel overwhelmed by the vast numbers of willing offers.

After you have sorted out the ones who can meet your budget and timetable, how do you make a good decision?

Look at their response

- How much care have they shown?
- Does their use of language, grammar, punctuation, and spelling demonstrate their professional capability?
- Have they paid attention to your specific requirements and shown they can handle them?

How confused do you feel?

Are you asking for the type of editing you need right now? This [guide to the different types of editing](#) might help.

If you asked for an editor to help with building the structure of your book and to polish your language, you should expect to receive a response along the lines of “I can do a developmental edit, and later, we can talk about a copyedit.” An editor who pretends this is one job at 2 cents a word may not be your best long-term choice.



Research likely candidates

Look at their websites and CVs. Do a Google search and see what comes up. Many editors are on LinkedIn and on YouTube. Feel free to download any freebies they offer so that you can get a sense of their personalities and style.

Familiarity with your market

You need an editor who can edit in US English, or UK English, or Australian English, depending on where you intend to sell your book. This does not mean you need an American editor for an American market: many editors are skilled in editing in different variations of the English language. Differing time zones pose no practical issues, just good communication, and fees in local currencies can be paid by credit card in your own currency, perhaps with a nominal charge made by your card provider.

Don't overthink it

Does your gut instinct say you can work with this person? Don't be afraid to discard the "perfect" candidate if you feel any doubt. Equally, give a little more attention to the ones that intrigue you. See the next point...

If you face a dilemma, seek more information

You will feel impatient to nail down someone but if you have questions, get answers. It's time well spent. I promise you. For one thing, you want to probe their responsiveness. Any editor who wants to work with you for the long term will be anxious to keep this moving. Set yourself a deadline to make a final decision, say, in three business days, or a week from now.

Request a free sample edit; five pages or 1,250 words is a reasonable sample.



Questions to help you pick an editor

These are some questions that might help you to differentiate between your short-listed editors. I assume you have already weeded out editors that have not proved they work in your headline genre (nonfiction, memoir, fiction) or whose experience does not convince you they are a good fit. I assume they have indicated they can meet your budget and timeline (although perhaps without giving the specific detail you need).

Choose a few questions that matter to you and ask your prospective editor:

- Will you provide a sample edit of my pages?
- How do you plan to keep me updated on your progress?
- What tools will you use to edit my work?
- How exactly does your editing process work? How many rounds of revision do you provide. (For example, I set out [my process](#) on my website.)
- Would you say your editorial style is thorough? Supportive? Light-touch?
- What kind of authors work best with you?
- What do you most want to gain from working with an author?
- Will we have a face-to-face call at the end of the edit to talk through your changes?
- My work contains themes of [INSERT]. Tell me about two books you have worked on with similar themes, so prove to me you are comfortable with that.
- (If you have not specified a style to follow) In which style will you edit this work?¹
- Do you include a [Style Sheet](#) with your finished edit?
- Do you check facts in the manuscript?
- What happens if you don't finish on time? Let's get clear about the consequences.

¹ In the US, it might be the *Chicago Manual of Style (18th Ed)*. In the UK, *New Hart's Rules: The Oxford Style Guide*.

- What is your approach if we disagree about an edit?
- What are your legal terms of business? Do we sign a contract? When do you require payment – before you start? Before you deliver the edits? After sending me the edits?
- If you work in a different country to mine, do you enable payment by credit card?
- Does your quote include any local tax payable?
- (If editor has not yet said) What is the soonest exact date you are available to start?
- What is one thing I should know about you before I commit to working with you?

The back and forth these questions will elicit will tell you what your working relationship with that editor is likely to be. Everyone can fire off an email telling a great story about their experience, but it takes more effort to demonstrate professionalism over time.

I wish you all the best in your search for a great editor, and good luck with your book!

Ruth

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Member, Chartered Institute of Editing and Proofreading
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