

How to make your author love you

By *Tammy Ditmore, eDitmore Editorial Services*

As more and more work in the writing/editing/publishing world is conducted remotely, writers and editors find fewer and fewer chances to work side by side or even meet face to face. That lack of experience sometimes causes editors to forget there is a person behind an e-mail address, which can lead to difficult working relationships.

Editors who have never looked an author in the eye to explain their revisions may think editing primarily involves manipulating characters on a screen. But the best editors always remember they are working not with files but with writers who need and deserve attention, patience and respect.

Editors who cultivate good relationships with authors can expect enthusiastic referrals and repeat business, in addition to the satisfaction of a job well done. Nothing can duplicate personal experience, but this list of the Top 10 Ways to Make Your Author Love You can help editors endear themselves to writers. The tips are primarily for freelance editors and novice authors, but most hold true for any editor-author relationship.

10. Be dependable. If you say you can finish a book in two weeks, don't make your author come looking for you a month later. If you know you're not going to make your deadline, come clean as soon as possible. And don't drastically overshoot your estimated hours without prior approval. Writers whose editors have been late and over budget understandably have a low opinion of editors.

9. Be available. Many editors prefer e-mail to phone calls or in-person meetings. But authors often want at least one phone conversation before handing you "their baby." A few minutes on the phone can establish your

ability to be a good caretaker; plus, you can often get more information in a 15-minute phone call than you can in 15 e-mail exchanges. Knowing what authors expect is key to providing the service that will make them love you.

8. Be transparent. Let would-be clients know exactly what you do and don't do. Explain how you will edit their work, what you charge and how long you think the project will take. A formal, written contract can reduce some of the mystery, particularly for newbie authors, and can back you up if a dispute arises about a deadline or fee.

7. Be honest and professional. Make sure you know what you're talking about before you start telling other people what they should and should not do. Take classes; get coaching. And don't assume your experience in one field qualifies you to edit in all fields. Romance novel editors deal with issues that tech manual editors need never consider, and vice-versa. If you want to break into a new subfield, be honest about your experience. Do a job for free or offer reduced rates until you build up some expertise.

6. Be willing to teach. If you plan to edit in Track Changes but your author has never used this feature, provide some simple instructions or include some reference materials. If your author is new to publishing, offer pointers about the process or recommend resources. While editing, show authors how to avoid particular errors. The more expertise you offer, the more reasons your author will have to trust you.

5. Be encouraging. Find ways to show authors you are their Number 1 Fan. Many authors fear editors just want to make wholesale, pointless changes to their work. A good editor can put a writer's fears to rest while

nurturing talent. When editing, point out an author's triumphs as well as mistakes. A "Nicely worded!" or "Beautiful description!" can help balance out all the times you point out errors.

4. Be critical. Yes, this is the flip side of Tip Number 5. As reluctant as authors are to be "judged," they need editors to provide an honest appraisal. Dedicated authors understand the concept of "no pain, no gain." Be honest; show an author what needs to be cut, what needs to be added, what needs to be strengthened, and give advice on how best to proceed. Just do it kindly.

3. Be flexible. Rigid editors who employ a one-size-fits-all set of rules are every writer's nightmare. Understand your author, your author's intended audience and your author's writing style and tailor your editing to fit. Don't try to make an article intended for an academic journal sound conversational. Don't revise all the dialog in an urban novel to be grammatically correct. Stay current on shifting vocabulary and grammar rules. Language is fluid and flexible; editors should be, too.

2. Be humble. Authors are often told, "Show; don't tell." A good rule for editors might be: "Ask; don't tell." If you think your author has misspelled a name or written an impossibly complicated sentence or perpetuated a grammar no-no, explain what you see as a problem, offer a remedy and ask if the author approves. You don't need to do this with every typo, obviously, but including a simple "my revision OK?" when you have recast a sentence or corrected a fact signals reinforces that your author has the last word. Writers (like most of us) generally prefer suggestions to commandments.

1. Be invisible. Editors know they

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THE **FREELANCER**

Author love, continued

have done a good job when only the author knows for sure what was done. While poor editing can be painfully apparent, good editing should not be so obvious. Good editors fix mistakes, strengthen arguments and polish prose in ways that fit seamlessly into the fabric the author has already woven. “The editor made it much better without losing what was me” is how one author described a good editing job. That’s the kind of compliment any editor would love to get. And the kind of editor any author would love to have.

Tammy Ditmore of eDitmore Editorial Services (www.editmore.com) helps writers shape and sharpen their words so they can produce accurate, engaging and error-free messages. She works with authors, publishers, scholars and businesses, and specializes in non-fiction, Christian and academic publications.

Next issue: For authors, “How to Make Your Editor Love You.” ■

Member news, continued

only one still using one of these bags on occasion?

“At the time, the current version of *CMS* was the 12th edition.

“The second EFA office, a light-filled, palatial space high in the same building, saw such events as the theft of an office typewriter, during the time **Laurie Lewis** and I shared the co-exec title ... In 1997–98, I produced (the) EFA’s last print directory of the membership, which I still argue is easier to annotate than the online version! In that directory, the ‘international division’ consisted of four names, of whom **Josephine Bacon** is the only one I recognize as still being a member.

“(The) EFA then moved west down 23rd Street, to its present building, where the office is now in its third iteration. Here the rolls have passed the 2,000-member mark, if I remember correctly. And the organization has

matured immeasurably over the years that I’ve been a member.

“I’ve been pleased to lend a hand whenever possible to these efforts, and have been honored to remain a member during these 28 years of EFA’s 30+ years of existence.” He promised to “remain in touch with all the friends and colleagues from here.”

In response to Hall’s post, “EFA without David Hall? That is hard to imagine,” said **Elliot Linzer**, also an EFA former co-executive.

“The EFA office on East 23rd Street was actually the second. We had one on East 20th Street before that. I don’t remember the exact dates. Before that, (the) EFA was run out of the apartments of its founders.

“David Hall left his permanent imprint on this organization. He will be missed by many of us, especially the longtime members.” ■