TRANSCRIPT

The Editing Podcast, Season 1, Episode 12
How long does editing take?

Louise Harnby: Hello and welcome to Episode 12 of The Editing Podcast. And this is the final episode for Season 1!

Denise Cowle: I can't believe we've come to the end of it.

LH: I know! The time's flown. So talking of time, this week we're talking about how long editing takes.

DC: We are indeed, and I think we need to think not just about how long a project actually takes to complete but how far ahead you need to think about booking help from a professional.

LH: Definitely. So the main determiner is how long the project is. That sounds obvious but it's a good reminder that when you're contacting an editor, or scheduling your own editing, do so with a word count in mind. So, we're going to talk about some of the issues that affect editing time, but it's worth revisiting some of the ballpark timings we talked about in Episode 4 on the cost of editing.

DC: Yes, so we gave some broad figures just to give you an idea of editing speeds. So a developmental editor might manage between 250 to 1,500 words an hour. So an 80,000-word book would take anything between 53 and 320 hours.

LH: And we quoted 1,000 to 2,500 words per hour for line and copyediting. For that same 80,000-word book we'd be looking at 32 to 80 hours.

DC: And then proofreading's more like 2,000 to 4,000 words per hour, which works out at 20 to 40 hours of work for that 80,000-word book.

LH: So it really helps if you've identified what kind of editing you need, and we covered this in detail in Episode 1. But following on from this is the word count. Sometimes authors have got in touch and told me they've got a 20-page chapter that needs editing. The problem is that I've got no idea how many words are on that page or whether that page is A4, A5, or whether the font size is 8 or 14 point, and that point size will determine what can be squeezed on a page. So our advice is to think it terms of word count rather than pages when

you're scheduling your own editing time or making initial contact with a pro editor.

Now the other thing that's crucial is the complexity of the material and what you need help with. Denise, do you want to jump in on that?

DC: Right, so there's a massive difference between doing a final proofread for a 10,000-word brochure that's been through three rounds of refinement where we're just checking for any remaining spelling mistakes or punctuation problems, and a 10,000-word journal article written by an academic who's still mastering writing in a second language. That's going to need a deeper level of editing and it will take a lot longer.

LH: Yes, and for me working in fiction, there are similar issues. If I'm being asked to proofread an 80,000-word mystery that's been through 5 author drafts, and a round of developmental and copyediting, that's going to be a lot quicker than if I'm doing a book with the same word count but I'm the first fresh set of eyes on the novel. The line editing's going to be deeper and I'm going to have deal with more than just last-minute typo spotting. I might have to deal with viewpoint problems, or offer sentence recasts, or help the authors deal with repetition or with overwriting issues.

DC: Plus, the level of editing you've requested will also come into play here. So if you're working with a developmental editor to help shape the structure of your writing, the editing might need a round of back-and-forth that take months.

LH: Yes, whereas if you and your editor are smoothing and refining at sentence level, they're more likely to be able to work on the full project in one hit, so that process will be more condensed. And so how long editing takes will depend on how many rounds of editing you want and what you want the editor to achieve during those.

DC: And we should mention fact-checking too – so this applies to fiction and non-fiction. If your editor needs to verify information in your writing – so I'm thinking about key dates, spellings of places and people's names and other proper nouns – all that has to be factored in to how long the editing will take.

LH: And for non-fiction work, you might be checking that in-text citations match what's in the bibliography too, won't you, Denise?

DC: Yes, and that's really important for academic work because poorly rendered, incorrect or missing citations or references are frowned upon at the least and can be considered plagiaristic at worst.

LH: And depending on the style guide, as I recall from doing academic editing years ago, even the way the citations are formatted is really important, isn't it? And there are all sorts of different styles – APA, Vancouver, Chicago, AMA, just to complicate things.

DC: That's absolutely right, and perhaps it's even more of an issue if the material is highly specialized, like scientific or legal writing, or writing that has legal implications.

LH: That reminds me of my husband. He works in the marketing department for large insurance company, and often the thing that takes the most time is not the editing and proofreading of the words on the email campaigns. It's the back-and-forth between the marketers and the legal-compliance team, because getting that wrong could have catastrophic consequences.

The other big issue that's going to affect time is what level of quality you're prepared to accept. Now, Denise, you wrote a really great guest blog post for me on this issue of good enough, which we'll put in the show notes, but do you want to jump in here and talk about that?

DC: Yes, so it really depends on what your goals are. And I honestly do think there are occasions when it's okay to put out content with errors. I'm not advocating that any writer completely abandon standard grammar, spelling and punctuation, but for certain types of written content it's just better to get it out there.

So think about pieces of writing that have a short lifespan, or that are conversational or informal. And if that writing has a really high value, and your intended audience is likely to value that over perfection, good enough is what you should be aiming for.

LH: I think that's a really good point. If you're creating content that's designed to make your business visible, it's better that it's out there and being read than sitting on your computer, awaiting perfection, because if it's inaccessible to everyone else on the planet except you and Microsoft Word, then it's not serving a purpose, is it? It's not entertaining anyone, not educating anyone, not engaging anyone. It's utterly unhelpful.

DC: That's exactly it. Plus, timing might be of the essence and so you might decide to invest less time in the editing process. Maybe you need to get it out in time for a specific event. If so, you might just do the best you can now so you can meet the deadline, and then revisit the editing when you have more space. Again, this is going to come down to how forgiving your audience is.

LH: I think this issue of good enough comes into play in the fiction market too. So if you're submitting to an agent, you might not need to get it absolutely perfect, with every single comma in place. Ultimately, of course, the story needs to be readable and thoroughly engaging, so rushing the developmental editing stage is not something I'd recommend. But I think authors need to think very carefully about whether every single comma needs to be perfect if they're trying to get representation and, ultimately, a publishing contract. Story-level quality is where the time needs to be spent.

DC: We should talk about teams too because sometimes a project will be time sensitive but quality will still be paramount.

LH: Yeah, so good enough won't be enough.

DC: Exactly. So it might be that you have a team of people who can help you with editing – perhaps your web content is verified by other people in your company. But even if you're working with third-party professional editors, if you have large files with tens of thousands of words, you might be better off working with an editing agency or an editorial collective, because then there are multiple editors who can work on the document simultaneously.

LH: Style guides can really come into play here, I think. So if consistency is important to you, it's essential that there's already an agreed set of standards about how the material's going to be laid out, and how it's going to be handled in terms of decisions about spelling, grammar, punctuation, numbering, capitalization, hyphenation, and headings. And all the editors in the team need to be familiar with that. That can really speed up the editing process, and it's a good option if quality is as important as time.

DC: We talked about style guides in Episode 7 so if you haven't listened to that, but you want more guidance on how to record specific decisions on spelling, grammar, punctuation, numbering, headings, and so on, do give that a listen. There are also some useful tools and resources in the show notes for that episode that you can download to save you time.

The other thing I want to mention is being realistic about how long a writer or editor can sit at a screen and edit a piece of text.

LH: That's a really good point, because even if there are 10 hours available in a day for editing, I know I my eyes are tired after 5 hours of solid work. However, I know someone who specializes in quick turnaround work, and can do up to 10 hours a day, though she takes a ton of regular breaks to ensure she stays fresh.

DC: Yeah, it's very personal. Still, most people aren't as efficient at spotting problems 10 hours into a project, so I think authors do need to assume that the editing working day is likely to be shorter than longer.

Now, bearing all this in mind, let's talk now about how to plan ahead. Because ... and I know we've both encountered this ... some authors do assume that editors will be available next week. But that is so often not the case.

LH: That's right – more experienced editors who have established relationships with publishers and existing business and indie author clients can be booked up months in advance. And if you're looking for good quality editing, you don't want to be asking an editor to rush. That's not going to help push your project forward. And I don't know any editor who feels comfortable agreeing to do poor-quality work. Particularly since it can come at a high price because of rush fees. That's just taking a thump twice.

DC: Exactly, so if you're working with a third-party, start putting out feelers well in advance. That way you'll be more likely to secure the services of your best-fit editor rather than rushing and picking someone out of desperation.

I tell my business clients to start having conversations with editors early on in the writing process.

LH: Yep, me too with fiction authors. Now I think it's particularly hard for newer writers to get a sense of how long the writing and self-editing process will take, but even if that's the case for you, at least do the research early on because even if you don't secure a firm date until later, at least you'll have discovered *who* you want to work with. Like Denise said, you don't want to end up working with someone out of desperation.

And the other thing to say is that some authors might have fixed publication dates in mind, but get in touch with their editor only a couple of months in advance. So if you want your book out for Christmas, October isn't the time to be sourcing an editor. May is the time to be sourcing your editor. That means you've got more chance of getting the editor you want and giving them the time they need to do their bit *and* you the time you need to review their work before you go to market.

DC: And now it's time for Editing Bites! This is where we each recommend a favourite resource for writers. What have you got for us this week, Louise?

LH: So my recommendation is Paul Teague's podcast, Self Publishing Journeys. What I love about this is that Paul's an indie author himself, and in his podcast diaries he charts his own publishing journey. And not just the good

stuff, but the problems and frustrations he's facing. I love this aspect of it – it's very honest. But he gets some great author guests on too. So, in 2018, he chatted with writers of sci-fi, erotica, fantasy, crime and romance, but also non-fic too ... so I recall there was an episode with a school textbook author. And it's not just the writing process, but also discussions about tools and tactics for getting your books noticed and dealing with the ever-changing landscape of self-publishing.

DC: And mine is ELT Teacher 2 Writer, which does what it says on the tin! They help people who are teachers develop their skills to write materials for teaching, with a focus on English Language Teaching. They've written and published books on various aspects such as how to write worksheets, how to write teachers' books and how to write graded readers, and there are also training courses and webinars available. A great resource if you write educational materials.

LH: That's all for this week ... for this season. Thank you so much for listening to The Editing Podcast. We'll be back with Season 2 in a few months but in the mean time you can rate, review and subscribe via your podcatcher.

DC: And don't forget, if you have any questions or topics that you want us to cover, please do get in touch with us via The Editing Podcast Facebook page. If you ask us, we will answer. That's a promise!

LH: Yup, and all the links we've mentioned are in the show notes. Thanks for listening. Bye!

Editing bites

- <u>Self Publishing Journeys</u> (podcast hosted by Paul Teague)
- <u>ELT Teacher 2 Writer</u>

Plus: <u>Writing for business. When is good enough, enough? (Denise Cowle)</u>