

TRANSCRIPT

The Editing Podcast, Season 1, Episode 4 How much does editing cost?

Denise Cowle: Hello and welcome to Episode 4!

Louise Harnby: So, you can't do a podcast about editing without talking about the C word.

DC: Oh my God, woman, what are you talking about?

LH: Cost, I'm talking about cost! Spondoolies, wonga, the green stuff.

DC: Okay, money. Right then, carry on. As you were!

DC: Okay, so this episode is all about how much professional editing will cost if you decide to hire a third party.

DC: I'm still recovering! So the short answer is, it depends ... on the individual editor, on which industry surveys and reports you read, on the required turnaround time, and on how complex the project is.

LH: That's it. So let's look at the individual editor thing first. I think most pro editors have been in a situation where we've given a writer a price, and they've turned around and said, 'But I got a quote from two other people and they were cheaper than you.'

DC: Yes, been there!

LH: Yes, but the thing is, there *is* no one rate. We're independent business owners, and the indie editing marketing is global and diverse. We specialize in carrying out different types of editing – some of us specialize by subject or genre. So I'm a fiction editor and about 90% of my work is crime and thrillers. And, Denise, you're a non-fiction specialist.

DC: That's right – I specialize in education and business materials – everything from student materials and teacher methodology to reports and web copy.

LH: And all of us have different business models and varied costs of living. And that means that despite what you might read in this or that survey, there is no single, universal rate.

DC: That is so true. But it's not just that. It's also that there's no universal way of offering that rate: Some editors charge by word. Some editors charge by hour. Some editors charge by page. And some editors offer a flat fee.

So, come on, Louise, it's time to put our cards on the table and give people some numbers! Now, these are just ballparks. Just because this is what we're charging in the main in 2018 doesn't mean others are. Go on – you start.

LH: That's right – throw me to the wolves, why don't you? Right, so my preference is to charge on a per-1,000 words basis. My 2018 rates are around £17 per 1,000 words for line/copyediting, and £13 per 1,000 words for proofreading, subject – of course – to seeing a sample of the novel.

If I'm asked to work on a novel serially, as I've recently agreed to, the price goes up to £22 per 1,000 words because of the additional challenges involved and the economies of scale that are lost. But it really does depend on the parameters of the project. Now it's your turn. Spill!

DC: I generally base my charges on a per-hour basis, anything between £30 and £45, depending on the sample. I'll give the client a project fee and detail what they get for that fee, including the number of hours it'll take me. I find it's more helpful to do that – they know what they have to budget for and they also see the scope of what I'm offering to do for them.

LH: Yeah, that's a good point – not everyone understands that editing or proofreading takes much longer than it would take to simply read your book. Authors, ask yourself how long it took to *write* it.

DC: And it's worth pointing out here that for some of my publishing clients, they set the fee, not me, so it's up to me to decide whether it's comparable with my rate. Even when it's lower than I'd like, I might still take the job if it's something I'm interested in doing.

Some editors charge more than us, some less, and some the same. Our colleagues live all over the world, and fluctuations in the currency-exchange markets mean that any comparisons between editors from different countries will change from day to day.

So, let's talk about what the industry surveys and reports have to say about the money.

LH: I'm not doing my Tom Cruise impression for you.

DC: Go on. Say, 'Show me the money!'

LH: How about I say what the Society for Editors and Proofreaders suggests for minimal hourly rates?

DC: Tell 'em!

LH: Again, these are minimum ballparks, but they suggest – per hour – 32.60 per hour for developmental editing, £28/30 for copyediting, and £24.30 per hour for proofreading [2018]. And the Association of Freelance Editors, Proofreaders & Indexers in Ireland suggests a minimum of €40 for developmental editing, €40 for copyediting and €25–35 for proofreading.

DC: And the Editorial Freelancers Association in the USA is suggesting US\$45–55 per hour for developmental editing, US\$30–50 for copyediting, and US\$30–35 for proofreading.

Now, I think we need to chat about whether these rates are realistic.

LH: Definitely. I have to be honest, I hate seeing reports like this because I worry that writers look at them and think, *That's the fee. That's what it's going to cost, regardless of anything else.* And, sure, sometimes there'll be a match between what an editor quotes and what's in those reports, but sometimes there won't. But that doesn't mean that the editor's got it wrong. So I know I'm not alone in aiming for rates at least 30% higher than what those organizations are suggesting.

DC: I totally agree with that. I'm the same. And it's not because we've got it wrong but because we're charging what we need to make our businesses work. I'm not doing this as a

hobby. This is my livelihood. I love it, and I feel really fortunate to be doing a job I love, but I have to make it work. My business has to be profitable otherwise I'm going to go *out* of business!

LH: Absolutely. Editing and proofreading aren't activities we do in our spare time. They're careers that enable us to pay the bills. If we can't meet our living costs, we become insolvent, just like any other business owner.

I think also that one of the problems with these ballparks is that they don't reflect the speed at which an individual works, the complexity of each job, the time frame requested, or the editor's circumstances ... or the writer's for that matter.

DC: And an additional problem comes around when we think about how these organizations are defining 'proofreading', 'copyediting' etc. So we talked in Episode 1 about how we both do line and copyediting at the same time. And you call that 'line and copyediting', whereas I just refer to it as 'copyediting'. And then what the SfEP or the EFA defines as one particular editing service might not match what an author thinks that service involves.

LH: Yes, that's so true. And then there's the age-old issue of currency-exchange rates. What might seem a high rate to a writer one day could turn into something quite different the next, and not because the editor's or the author's life has changed, but because of Donald Trump, or the Bank of England, or a hung parliament, or a banking crisis.

DC: Yes, wars and referendums play havoc with editing rates! I guess what we're saying is that editors are professional business owners, and just like any other business owner we're responsible for tax, insurance, sick pay, holiday pay, and maternity/paternity entitlements.

LH: Yes, and training and continued professional development, equipment, accounting, promotion, travelling expenses, pension provision, and other business overheads.

DC: So the next thing to talk about is how the turnaround time affects the price of editing. So again, we're talking about ballparks, aren't we?

LH: Yes. Definitely. The complexity of the project will come into play, and so will how many hours a day the editor chooses to work. Still, let's have a crack. We've got some stats on this so let's share them.

DC: Okay, so – and remember, these are ballparks – a developmental editor might be working at an editing speed of around 250 to 1,500 words an hour. So for an 80,000-word book that's going to take between 53 and 320 hours. That's a really wide range!

LH: Yes, really broad. Copyediting is a little easier to pin down, but there's still a range. So we're looking at a speed of 1,000 to 2,500 words per hour. I think that's realistic. So for that same 80,000-word book, you're talking 32 to 80 hours of work.

DC: And then proofreading is 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. The thing we have to remember though is that that's editing time. We'll spend additional time on business administration, marketing and training.

LH: So here's how costs might begin to creep. Imagine you ask your editor to copyedit that 80K-word book. The editor estimates the job will take 50 hours, or two weeks, because they

edit for around 5 hours a day. However, you need it in one week. And if you really want to work with that editor, they're going to have to work 10 hours a day, not 5. That means they have to pull 5 evenings on the trot in addition to their standard working day.

DC: Exactly, and that evening work is when we hang out with our families, recharge our batteries, catch up with friends, support our dependents, carry out the weekly food shop, help our kids with their homework ...

LH: Yes ... normal stuff that lots of people do.

DC: If you want an editor to work during that time, it's probably going to cost you more.

LH: Yes. So I charge triple my standard rate because that's what it going to cost to bribe my daughter and stop her accusing me of neglect. Bad-mum compensation costs! And I'm sort of joking but, actually, that's a real issue – time is precious to all of us.

DC: I haven't often had to impose rush rates, actually, but when I have it's been double. And the client totally got it – they were just so grateful to get the work done to their deadline. Maybe I *should* have charged triple!

LH: Yes!

DC: So, we're on the last stage. There's one more thing that's going to affect the price and that's the complexity of the project. In a nutshell, the more the editor has to do, the longer the job will take and the higher the cost.

LH: Yes, so in my case, with fiction, sometimes an author – especially if it's their first novel – might come to me thinking they need a proofread, like a final tidy-up. But, actually, it might turn out that there are major problems with their punctuation or grammar, and although it's not technically difficult for me to fix those problems, if they're extensive, it can be incredibly time consuming.

DC: This is very common with my business clients. They ask for a proofread of a report, but really what they need is a thorough copyedit. That's generally less a case of them thinking that it doesn't need much doing to it and more that 'proofreading' is the term they know that's closest to what they need. So I never assume that it's only a proofread. It's generally a copyedit until proven otherwise.

LH: And another example from my stable is how I've copyedited novels whose authors have nailed narrative point of view at developmental editing stage, so I haven't needed to do that. But I've also copyedited novels in which POV had become confused and I could see that in the sample, and so I had to adjust my fee to take that into account.

DC: And I might be sent a Word document that has photos, tables and graphs pasted into it. I have to extract all these into a separate artwork file, cue them into the text at the right spot – so that means telling the designer that Figure 3 goes here, for example – and make sure they are all numbered and captioned correctly, and that the in-text references to them are correct.

And that's before I've looked at one word of the actual text! If I haven't been told about that beforehand, it will definitely need a discussion with the author about the fee.

LH: So let's wrap up with a quick summary: There is no universal rate for editing. And there is no universal way of offering that rate.

DC: And what you pay, or think you might pay, will depend on the editor, what reports and surveys you read, on the time frame, and on complexity of the project.

LH: Do you know what time it is, Denise?

DC: Is it time for Editing Bites, Louise?

LH: I think it is! So this is our weekly feature where we each recommend a tool or resource. You go first.

DC: This week I want to recommend *Everybody Writes: Your Go-to Guide to Creating Ridiculously Good Content* by Anne Handley. Anne is one of my favourite people – if you ever get a chance to see her speak on stage, grab it!

It's a fantastic guide to creating and publishing the kind of content that will make your business thrive. We all rely on our words to carry our marketing messages. We are all writers, and our words are our currency; they tell our customers who we are. Our writing can make us look smart or it can make us look stupid. It can make us seem fun or trustworthy, or humdrum or flat-out boring. So you have to choose words well. And it means you put a new value on an often-overlooked skill: how to write, and how to tell a true story really, really well. If you're writing non-fiction, especially for business, check it out – you won't regret it!

LH: That's a great tip. I'm going to meet Anne in March I think, and I'm really excited because you love her and I love you, so I figure I'm going to love *her*. Anyway, my bite is *How NOT to Write a Novel: 200 Mistakes to Avoid at All Costs if You Ever Want to Get Published* by Howard Mittelmark and Sandra Newman. I love this book – it's funny. And I think some readers might find it a bit abrasive at times but actually it's packed with really great advice on things to watch out for when you're writing fiction. And if you read that before you start writing, I think it will save you time when you're editing drafts.

DC: That's all for this week. Thank you so much for listening to The Editing Podcast. You can rate, review and subscribe via your podcatcher.

LH: And don't forget to tell your writer friends, your editor friends, your business friends ... basically anyone who writes!

DC: And if you have any questions, 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: And don't forget – all the links we've mentioned are in the show notes. Thanks for listening.