



TRANSCRIPT: SEASON 2, EPISODE 2
4 KINDS OF WRITER, AND HOW EDITING HELPS

Denise Cowle: Hello and welcome to The Editing Podcast.

Louise Harnby: Hello! This week, we're talking about different kinds of writers and how identifying what kind you are can help you work out the kind of editing that's the best fit for you.

DC: That's right. We all feel differently about writing – for some of us it's a pleasure to sit down and let the words flow, but for others it's painful. It can involve long periods of staring into space, followed by muttering and frantic deletions, perhaps even the odd expletive.

LH: Surely not. No swearing in this podcast, Denise. We don't want iTunes punishing us! You're right though – it's not pleasant for everyone, and yet for some it's a necessary part of the job. So my friend Helen is a good example. She's a scientist and has to write regular reports on marine geotechnical surveys. The material is complex, and it will be read by fellow scientists. But it's also going to be in front of people who aren't so fluent in the geophys but who *do* hold the purse strings. And it needs to be accessible to them. Huge contracts are at stake.

DC: Exactly. When you're writing for clients, it's vital that your message is compelling, consistent and, most of all, clear. Whether you're a confident, nervous, reluctant or impatient writer, the chances are you'll benefit from having someone review that.

So, let's have a look at four different types of writer. Maybe you'll recognise yourself.

LH: First up is the **confident** writer. If this is you, the idea of somebody changing so much as a comma of your writing makes you shudder. You've been told you're a good writer and you were always strong in English at school.

DC: Second is the **nervous** writer. You write well and the words flow onto the page but you're worried about making mistakes with punctuation, spelling and

grammar. You waste time second-guessing yourself about what is and isn't correct and agonize over pushing whatever button will deliver that writing to your audience.

LH: Third is the **reluctant** writer. Writing just isn't your thing, and you spend so long trying to wrestle the words on the page that you lose all perspective and everything looks wrong.

DC: And finally, the **impatient** writer. You just want to get the damn thing out there and be done with it as quickly as possible, and hope that no one notices or minds any made mistakes you've made.

Each one of those writers needs to take the time for editing, whether that's structural work or more micro-level copy-editing and proofreading. So how might those four categories influence the decisions you make about revising your work?

LH: If you're confident, and writing from a position of knowledge or expertise, your readers might be unfamiliar with the language or terminology you use. That's like my friend Helen I mentioned earlier. The editing process for her is not just about picking up typos and grammar errors. It's about ensuring that the text is accessible. It might involve explaining terminology, or simplifying and rewording so readers don't get distracted.

DC: You can also just be too close to your work, and your familiarity with it means you see what you want to, rather than what's actually there. This is why we can read and reread something several times until we're convinced it's perfect, only for someone to pounce on a glaring error within seconds of looking at it. I don't think we can ever underestimate the benefit of having a fresh set of eyes on what you've written.

LH: That's so true. I've found that in my own writing many a time. Not just the blogs I write but the short fiction too. And even some of my most confident fiction author clients just don't spot their own writing tics. I've been working on a novel recently where the author's a really confident writer – very good at structure and pacing. And he nails his chapter endings every time. But he does like to have his characters blinking. There's so much blinking going on in that book that it makes me blink. Anyway, I've sorted out those twitchy eyes so that's fine, but it's a good example of how we can't spot problems in our own stuff even if we love putting words on a page.

DC: Nice segue into twitchiness coming up now! So for nervous writers, the revision stage is about relieving stress. I think this is where working with a third-party editor really shines because knowing that someone else is going to smooth the text leaves you free to focus on writing naturally and letting your

voice come to the fore. I worked with a business writer a few months ago whose authorial voice is gorgeous – really compelling.

LH: Is that the lovely Kenda Macdonald, who we interviewed in Season 1?

DC: Yes! So she was writing for audiences who didn't have the background in cognitive psychology that she does, so working with her to ensure her message was clear but understandable, and tidying up the spelling, punctuation and grammar, let her concentrate on ensuring her writing popped.

LH: And the fact that you weren't approaching that with the same educational background was really useful for her because if something wasn't clear to you, it wouldn't be to her audience either.

DC: Exactly – that's a good point, actually. Whatever kind of writer you are, having a non-specialist reviewing your work can really help to ensure that you're on point for your audience. Does that kind of thing come up in fiction?

LH: It does. I edited a mystery centred around an amateur baseball camp. My author's got a really distinctive narrative voice but there were a couple of occasions where I tripped on the terminology and he was glad I wasn't American because his audience isn't just American, and it gave him a nudge to tighten up things in a few places so it was accessible but without ruining the story flow.

DC: So what kind of editing's best for the reluctant writer? I think this is about bigger-picture work. Reluctant writers can end up with a message that's tied up in knots ... so editing that looks at the writing as a whole, and assesses where the structure and flow need tightening up or clarifying.

LH: It's like the editor is there on behalf of the reader. And for business writing, actually, it might even be worth working with someone who can go beyond editing and help with copywriting too, do you think, Denise?

DC: Definitely. So in that case, the author can write down their key points and the copywriter can develop and expand these into a coherent piece. That will cost more but it saves a lot of time and stress.

LH: I had a comment on a LinkedIn post about this recently from a fiction writer. I'd written a post about conveying physical violence in fiction effectively and she said that she sometimes writes scenes of violence for fellow authors who'd rather not – they want that content in their fiction but it turns their stomach to put it on the page. I must admit, I found the concept a little strange. I wouldn't want another writer writing bits of my fiction! I'd worry about my style not being mimicked properly. But everyone's different so it was really interesting to get this point of view.

DC: It just shows how it's really important for editors and writers not to make assumptions. There really is no one way of doing things. What's important is that the copy or the novel or whatever are taking the reader where you want them to go.

LH: Exactly. So let's talk about impatient writers. Impatient writers are impatient to publish. They want to get their work out there and editing is an obstacle that slows them down! Impatient writers don't want to draft and revise over and over, no matter what anyone else recommends. I think this kind of writer probably benefits more than any other from fresh eyes.

DC: Yes, and from a non-fiction perspective there's brand at stake. Poorly proofed reports, brochures, blog posts and website copy reflect badly on the writer and the company. There's a risk that readers, who are potential customers, view the errors as evidence of sloppiness in other areas of the business. So in this case, professional editing isn't just about writing credibility, but also business integrity.

LH: I think the same can be said of fiction. Novelists have brands too, whether they have a traditional publishing contract or are their own publishers. I might try an author once, but if the book is poorly structured, I won't get into the story, or I'll find it difficult to follow. Or maybe the characters bore me rigid. Same thing with the sentence-level problems. If I'm constantly tripping over not just the odd error but pages littered with them, I'm not going to buy the second book because I won't trust that author to deliver.

DC: Yes. Actually, there is a fifth type of writer. You enjoy writing and are happy that you can produce clear, compelling text which is pretty error-free. You're confident you can catch your errors yourself. Fantastic!

LH: I remember reading Hugh Howey's take on this. I think when he wrote the original Wool trilogy and self-published, he did it all himself. Not sure what he thinks now that Arrow – a Penguin imprint – are publishing the books, but I remember reading those early books on my Kindle and they were in great nick. Still, I do think he's unusual. Amazon is rife with impatient novelists who have a ton of reviewers complaining about the mistakes. It's such a waste of an author's time if they don't take the time to at least learn the craft of self-editing.

DC: Yes, it really does pay not to get too complacent!

So now it's time for Editing Bites! This is the regular part of the show where we each offer you a recommended tool or resource.

Mine is a blog post with 10 tips for proofreading your own writing. It's perfect for small-business writers and includes some ideas you might not have thought of.

LH: There are some really nifty ideas in that. And I agree that it's perfect for shorter-form content. Even fiction writers could use that for flash and short stories.

So my Bite is a little ebooklet called 'How Does Your Reader Dance?' It's helps indie fiction authors decide what kind of revision to carry out in relation to how their audience might react.

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.

And please tell your writer, editor and business friends ... basically anyone who writes! You can get in touch with us via The Editing Podcast Facebook page. Drop your questions in there too and we'll get back to you.

LH: And don't forget – the links we've mentioned are in the show notes. Thanks for listening.

Editing bites

- 'How to proofread your own writing – 10 tips to clean up your writing': <http://bit.ly/2ZtmpJ9>
- 'How Does Your Reader Dance?': <http://bit.ly/2ZrKCQb>