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TRANSCRIPT: SEASON 2, EPISODE 7  
SO YOU WANT TO CHANGE YOUR EDITOR ...

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**Denise Cowle:** Hello and welcome to our The Editing Podcast! So go on, Louise, tell everyone what we're talking about this week.

**Louise Harnby:** Hello! So this episode came about after a writer got in touch to ask us if we'd provide some guidance on changing your editor. It's something she said had come up in an online writing group she's a member of and thought we might have some nuggets to share. So here we are!

**DC:** It's such a good topic because not prepping properly beforehand could leave you in a pickle. Before we dig into that though, don't forget that in Series 1, Episode 10, we talked about how to find an editor. That's definitely worth relistening to in terms of your actual search.

But, today, we're going to focus on what to think about in addition to the actual search so that you don't come unstuck. First, though, I think we should chat about why authors choose to change editors because it's not always a result of poor-quality work. In fact, that's probably the least likely scenario.

**LH:** Yes, good point, Denise. So something I've had to deal with lately is the **scheduling** issue. An author I'd worked with twice in previous years got in touch to ask if he could schedule his new book. Problem is, I was booked up way ahead of when he was hoping the work would start. And we did do a bit of back-and-forth to see if we could find a compromise but in the end I was still worried I was squeezing too much in and he was still worried about the date being too far ahead, even with the juggling we discussed. And, actually, it just seemed better that he worked with someone else, so that's what happened.

**DC:** And did you help him find someone or did you just leave him to it?

**LH:** Yes, I did help on this occasion. I referred him to another fiction editor who I thought would be a good and, fortunately, she was available. He still got her to do a sample edit so he could evaluate her approach, but it worked out really well for everyone. I'm not stressed about the timing and he's now

working with a good-fit editor who can do what he wants and when he wants it. I think it's good he's got two people he can go to, and depending on what he's got and what we're up to, he can choose.

**DC:** Yes, having that kind of choice is really good, especially if you're a prolific writer. Some business authors I know put out a lot of smaller, niche books on a regular basis and they need a fast turnaround. Backup services are essential because there's no guarantee an editor will be able to slot every project in their schedule.

**LH:** And another reason why you might need to change your editor is that they shift the focus of their business – perhaps from proofreading to copyediting or developmental editing. So all this means is that the service provision's no longer a good fit. It's nothing personal on either side.

**DC:** Still, there are times when things go wrong. Perhaps the author doesn't think the quality is up to scratch, or that happens the other way around. Perhaps the author's writing slips and the editor feels they need a deeper level of support.

**LH:** And sometimes things go awry because, even though no one's being intentionally awkward, life just gets in the way and either the author or the editor can't deliver what was promised and when. So let's turn to how to manage the process.

**DC:** Yes, so the first thing is to **plan ahead** as far as you can. Unless your old editor gives you a recommendation, you'll be sourcing your own replacement. And that means getting sample edits from a few to check you like their approach to your writing, and matching that with people who have availability when you need it.

**LH:** That's such an important point because many editors do get booked up well in advance. Sometimes it's months ahead, even a year.

Something else related to this is **giving notice**. Do let your current editor know that you're not going to be working with them again as soon as you can, particularly if you have projects pencilled in with them. That'll reduce the likelihood of friction and their being left with gaps in their schedule that they need to fill.

**DC:** And be honest about why you're not going to be working with them any longer. Pro editors want to understand why a client's going elsewhere. It might help them think about how to manage the way they run their schedule, or handle booking deposits, or the wording of their cancellation policies, which means they'll be able to provide more clarity for other authors.

**LH:** Actually, you've reminded me of something, Denise. So if you're changing your editor and have other projects already booked in, check their **cancellation policy** before you say anything. That way, you'll know if you're going to lose a deposit or if there are any other financial penalties. That way you can make informed decisions based on what the impact will be.

**DC:** Now, if you're intent on leaving your editor, and it's because the relationship has come unravelled, we recommend you keep things professional and to the point, just like any other business. The situations I've heard about where things have become upsetting have occurred because the departure was protracted and unclear.

**LH:** Exactly right, Denise. It's usually because either the editor or the author hadn't articulated their intention to end the partnership clearly, and there'd been confusion around time frames and penalties. I know of editors and authors who've been treated rudely and unprofessionally by the other party and it could all have been avoided if a business approach had been taken by the leaver.

So shall we chat now about more practical preparation for your new editor?

**DC:** Definitely. So for non-fiction and fiction, think about how you can help your new editor hit the ground running. **Style sheets** come into their own here. If you already have style sheets from previous projects, send those to your new editor, though if they're branded it would be polite to remove the former editor's information.

**LH:** We covered style sheets in Episode 7 of Season 1, but in a nutshell, these record a ton of stuff like spelling preferences, hyphenation and capitalization style, key dates, accepted and non-standard terminology, character names and traits in the case of fiction, reference styles, how numbers are rendered and so on. If you've already made decisions about this stuff, or your former editor has on your behalf, you can get your new person up to speed quicker if they have this information.

**DC:** I think it's worth talking in more detail about **subjectivity** and editing too, Louise, because that's something that's going to come into play with editing, though not proofreading.

**LH:** Really good point. Give 10 editors a sample and they should all pick up the misplaced apostrophe and typos. But how they'll recast a sentence for clarity could end up 10 different ways.

**DC:** Exactly. And that means that if you change your editor, you do have to accept that this might mean that there's a shift in how your books read, even if it's only subtle.

And that doesn't necessarily matter, especially with standalone books, and it *will* probably be subtle because editors should be trying to mimic author style and, in the case of fiction, character voice. But it would be disingenuous of us to ignore the fact that it's a possibility. You do need to be prepared for it, especially if you're writing a series.

**LH:** And on the fiction series side of things, there are a couple of useful tools that you might want to give your new editor. The first is a **chronological summary of events** – that'll give them an overarching view of who's who and what's what. The second is a **list of characters** who've appeared in your series. I found this really useful when one of my authors moved to me and I worked on his backlist. He'd used lots of different editors for his books the first time round, and none knew what had happened in other books. When I put together a character list, I noticed discrepancies between books with some of the names – inconsistencies of spelling for example, but also tics. Like lots of characters called Jimmy or James and Tyler and Skyler. He didn't realize he was doing it but those names kept on popping up all the time, and for series readers it could have been confusing.

**DC:** Good point. Now one other thing you can do is let your editor know your **preferences, pet peeves and any other writing tics** you're aware of. If you hate semi-colons with a passion, and want them nowhere near your text, tell them. If there's a particular referencing style you need to adhere to, let them know. And if you know you're prone to certain turns of phrase and want them to look out for those, compile a list and send it to them.

**LH:** And following on from that, think about some of the things your former editor told you about your writing and that they often dealt with. So if you're a fiction writer and you've been told you tend to overdo the filler words or you get stuck on punctuation, telling your new editor that so they can ready themselves to look out for the problem will make the transition smoother.

**DC:** So that's it on changing editors. Let's move on to Editing Bites! This is the regular part of the show where we each offer you a recommended tool or resource. What have you got for us this week, Louise?

**LH:** So my Bite is the **The NCW Podcast**, which is writing tips and author interviews from the National Centre for Writing. NCW is based in Norwich, where I live, in a grade 1 listed medieval building called Dragon Hall. And I'd recommend attending any of the events or tours taking place there. That building is amazing, really atmospheric but intimate. Anyway, there are some cracking episodes there, including the Val McDermid Lecture from the Norwich Crime Writing Festival in 2018, Mark Dawson on earning six figures

from self-publishing, Nicci French on collaborative writing, and loads more. It's gorgeous!

**DC:** Mine is actually two related bites: the *Oxford Dictionary of English Idiom* and the *Cambridge Dictionary of American Idioms*. And they're both great tools if you're working with a less familiar English and you want to check sense and meaning.

**LH:** 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.

**DC:** 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 as always, all the links we've mentioned are in the show notes. Thanks for listening.

Byeeee!

## Editing bites

- The NCW Podcast (National Centre for Writing): <http://bit.ly/31wXlms>
- *Oxford Dictionary of English Idiom*
- *Cambridge Dictionary of American Idioms*

## Other resources

- The Editing Podcast, S1E1: The different levels of editing
- The different levels of editing (booklet): <http://bit.ly/31AjKzt>
- The Editing Podcast, S1E10: How to find an editor
- The Editing Podcast, S1E7: Style sheets for writing and editing