



WHAT ARE CONTENT AND COPY EDITING?

Content and copy editing are distinct from proofreading. Proofreading means checking your work for spelling errors, incorrect punctuation, missing or doubled-up words (“He was in the the kitchen”), and so forth.

CONTENT EDITING

A content editor carefully reads through and critiques the content of your work. Keep in mind that we would not be considering your work if we did not think it merited publication. The purpose of content editing is to improve what is already good. We expect our authors to address the issues raised by content editors, although that does not mean they must do what we recommend.

Content editors look at such things as these:

- **Plot.** Does it lose momentum? Are there unresolved conflicts at the end of the book? Are there improbable events? Are there inconsistencies that need correcting (a handkerchief in one chapter that turns into a paper tissue in the next, trousers that are later described as jeans)?
- **Setting.** Is it convincing? Are there unintentional anachronisms? Does each scene have a clearly evoked setting? Are descriptions vivid and compelling, given the overall tone, genre and intentions of the book?
- **Characters.** Do they seem real? Are they all the same or clearly differentiated? If there are all men and no women (or vice-versa), is there a reason for it? Does each character have a purpose in the plot? Are there forgotten characters, important in earlier chapters and never mentioned again?

- Verb tenses. Does the narrative wander from past to present tense and back again for no particular reason? Is it clear when there are flashbacks or scenes that anticipate the future?
- Dialogue. Is it convincing, given the setting and characters? Do the men sound like men and the women like women? Is there too much dialogue? Too little? Does the reader know who is speaking? If some of the characters speak in a dialect or use foreign words, is it clear to the average reader?

COPY EDITING

Copy editing follows content editing, as there is little purpose in copy editing a text that will undergo revision. A copy editor is looking for the following:

- Consistent spelling. Is a word spelled one way in one chapter, another later in the book (for instance, OK and okay). Consistency also includes conformity to standard Canadian usage.
- Consistent and correct punctuation. A content editor will ensure that punctuation is consistent throughout the book and conforms to standard usage.
- Grammar and syntax. A copy editor will change an incorrect expression like “less calories” to “fewer calories.” Similarly, “He spoke quick” would be corrected to: “He spoke quickly.”
- Repeated words and phrases. A copy editor will bring these to the author’s attention and ask if they are intentional or accidental.

Copy editors understand that incorrect usage is often intentional in dialogue (“I ain’t going nowhere”), but seek to ensure that the book as a whole, especially the narrative portions, respect standard spelling, punctuation and syntax.