
UNIT 2 EDITING

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2.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

By the end of this Unit you will grasp the requirements of editing. An editor has to **scrutinise** and select good and useful reading material and order its presentation.

- You will come to know the difference between a copy editor and a general editor
- As a copy **editor** you must have a thorough grasp of **spelling**, punctuation, grammar, usage, etc.
- You should have a thorough knowledge of the various aspects of **book publishing**
- You must have a passion for literature, and a spirit of enquiry
- As a general editor you will have to scout for new writers and manuscripts
- You will learn the value of discretion in editing—no needless corrections
- You will learn to respect the job of an editor—hard work, patience and courtesy are rewarded

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Comparatively **speaking**, in the intellectual history of man, editing is rather a recent activity. If man developed the art of writing some six millennia ago, he has been at the job of editing only in the last two centuries or so. In fact, the need for it arose with increased reading, particularly of creative and non-creative texts. As more and more people started discovering the joy of reading, faster reproduction methods of reading material came to be devised. Along with the readers, the number of writers also multiplied. The areas of writing became diverse. With these developments came the need for scrutiny and selection of the right material and its orderly presentation which, in essence, constitutes editing.

2.2 THE WORD AND ITS MEANING

The word 'editing' is derived ~~from~~ the Latin **editus**, past principle of the verb **edere**—meaning, **to put forth, to give out, or to publish**. The editor selects, from the tons of material that comes into his mill—that is, he **sifts, cleanses** and **sorts out the best**, and **cooks** it to **please the** taste of the gourmet or the connoisseur. Reading

through **all** that is **submitted** for publication, either to the publishers or the press, selecting what would make good and useful **reading**, and presenting it to the **reading** public in the right form **and** shape—these are the main processes of editing.

2.3 KINDS OF EDITING

Generally speaking, editing is of two kinds, and these are known by their standard **terminology** of 'Copy Editing' and 'General Editing'. There is, however, no clear demarcation **between** the **two**, since the person handling one kind might do some of the jobs **associated** with the other, and vice versa.

2.3.1 Copy editing

Copy editing is more of a mechanical job, involving intelligence and experience. Any one who joins an editorial office as an apprentice will have to start with this. Copy editing involves **scrutinising**, with a microscopic eye, the copy or the manuscript (MS.) of a work, after it has been accepted for publication, and preparing it for the press. During this process, a copy editor marks the copy or the MS. for the **press—i.e.**, instructs the printer, through universally accepted and **understood** symbols, what matter should go in which type, and what style it should have in print. For instance, the title of a book or a word of foreign origin is always **italicised**, and this is indicated by **underlining** the matter once. Then there are **names** of characters in a play which, by convention, are shown in SMALL CAPITALS, abbreviated S.C., and for this the words are **underlined** twice. A quotation from some other work is shown within quotation marks. Or, it may be set off by indention from the main text and sometimes, in addition, as a house-style, given in a smaller typeface.

These styles have been **standardised** since the earliest days of publishing and have become universally accepted. Such acceptance of an approved style is to make easy the comprehension of the written text for the reader.

Training as an apprentice: There are almost hundreds of such stylistic details which a copy editor should know how to mark in a copy. There is no dearth of reference books on this **subject**, and every copy **editor** should have some of these ready at hand for consultation. But when it comes to learning, a course of apprenticeship under a **senior** editor in a publishing firm **will** be more helpful than mere reference **books**.

Spelling and punctuation: There is yet another thing a good copy editor has to be proficient in—he should take special care of spelling and punctuation. It is of the greatest importance that the copy be correct in this respect. For this, the copy editor should be familiar with **the** standard spellings. He should have a keen eye (or ear?) for diction. Faulty expressions, quaint and infelicitous words should be 'queried'—that is, a reference be made promptly to the senior editor or the author. A copy editor should also be careful about facts and dates.

Grammar and usage: He should have a sound knowledge of grammar and usage of the language. The MS. is generally passed on to the copy editor after the general editor has done his **part**. But it is still possible that both the author, and the general editor, might have slipped up on a point of grammar or usage. The copy editor **will** earn their gratitude if **he** points out such lapses. This is also one of the ways to train himself to become a general editor in due course of time.

Dressing the copy: It is also the job of the copy editor to 'dress' the copy—that is, to provide proper titles, **headlines**, sub-headings and cross-headings, etc. This again has to be done in **consultation** with the senior editor and the author.

Reference books: A **good** copy editor should have easy access to an array of such reference material as Dictionaries, Encyclopaedias, Guidebooks to Style and Usage, **Thesauri**, and a **Who's Who**, which will guarantee the accuracy of his work. He should never be **tried** of consulting such reference **materials**.

Needless to say, to be able to accomplish all this successfully, a copy editor should have a thorough **knowledge** of the various aspects of book publishing, and techniques of printing. Also, he should have a passion for literature. an eye for **detail**, and a spirit of questioning.

2.3.2 General editing—its historical background

Then there is the more serious, more responsible and also the more respectable level of editing—general **editing**. The man who does this job in a **publishing** house is called a publisher's editor; in a periodical press or a journal he is known **as** the literary editor.

The publisher's editor is a post-Second World War phenomenon. With the proliferation and diversification of the publishing industry in the last forty years, editing of **books** has become a matter of specialisation, and every publisher now has his own editorial department with one or more editors. At a time when authors were few and publishers fewer still, an author generally went directly to the printer with his manuscript, because the printer was often himself the publisher too. The author was supreme and what he wrote was printed as such, **that is, if** the MS. on the **whole** was acceptable to the printer-publisher. However, **publishing** progressively became an economically viable and independent activity, quite distinct from the printer's. Even then, there were no editors and the printer-publisher, and later the publisher himself, read the manuscript, took decisions about its acceptability, **fixed** the **style**, read the proofs and saw it through the press. But the situation, **as** explained above, has now changed. Similarly, with the periodical press—instead of the general **pool** of sub-editors, we have now separate editors for the Literary Page, Sports, Finance, etc.

Functions of a general editor

A general editor with a publishing firm, or a literary editor attached to a periodical, has to perform diverse functions. He has to scout for the right authors and manuscripts. He may even think up and develop new ideas and get books or articles written on them. From among the manuscripts that pour in, he has to decide what fits best into his scheme or framework, what goes well with his readers—and then select accordingly. Thereafter, he has to go through the manuscripts and **see** what **editorial** changes are necessary. Although the editor always remains behind the screen, it is on his enterprise that the fate of a publishing firm, or a literary paper or magazine hangs.

Activity 1

How many types of editing are there? Describe **them**. (50 words)

(Check your answer with that given at the end of the Unit)

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2.4 THE SCHOOLING OF AN EDITOR

Although **editing** is now getting to be common as a **profession** and editors, like lawyers and doctors, are becoming more and more **socially** ubiquitous, the calling as such is not **an** academic activity since it cannot be taught or learnt like any other

discipline. No doubt, we hear about training courses and workshops for editors, but a good editor is as original **and** creative as any author, since he learns his art by intuition, judgement and **long** experience. Basically, a general editor is a good critic who not only finds faults **but** also sets them right. He is a man with a deep appreciation of the **finest things** in literature, and he has a catholic taste which can take in the best from **everywhere**.

2.5 AN EDITOR AT WORK

Let us now see an **editor at work**, be he a publisher's editor or a literary editor. The editor's job starts with the **arrival** of a **manuscript** at his desk, and surely it is not like epiphany or divine grace, **something** which happens only once in a while. The MS. keep coming by every mail, and at times are brought in personally by the authors. Since the authors are often a touchy lot, an editor should be a genial **human** being who should never forsake **good** public relations. He cannot afford to be rude or snobbish to his authors. **He** should learn to say with a smile, 'Thanks! I'm glad you thought of us. I shall **certainly** go through your MS. with pleasure and let you know'—even if it amounts to giving a false hope to the author.

Then starts the none-too-pleasant task of going through the MS. At the **start** of one's career as an editor, this **may** pamper one's ego, but as time passes, it becomes a daily drudgery. There is no **escape** from this grind. At times, the MS. come flooding in like locusts, and it is **rarely** that an author brings in a ready-made printed book or article. Sometimes the **MS. may** be so badly typed or illegibly handwritten that wading through it will **become** a torture. But the editor must endure it **all**.

The length of the MS. should be the first consideration. If the **firm specialises** in publishing only small **books**, or the journal accepts only an 8-10 page article, then there is no point in **reading** through a longer MS. even though it is written by a celebrity. If the author is **well-known** and the writing seems good, it may be worthwhile to persuade **him** to prune it down to **the** required length for **reconsideration**. Otherwise, it must inevitably be returned to the author—unaccepted.

2.5.1 First reading

No **editor** on earth will **ever** have the time or patience to go through every word of every MS. All that he can **do** is to read the synopsis first (in case of a book), and see if the subject fits into his **scheme** of things. If it does, he can then proceed with the reading. Reading is of several kinds. There is first the cursory reading. An editor is like a doctor who, by **merely** feeling the pulse of his patient, can sometimes say whether the condition of his health is good or not. The first few pages of the MS. will tell whether it holds **interest**. Even if it does not, it is desirable to spend a few more hours on it, dip in here **and** there, understand the subject matter and treatment, see the end, etc. to get the hang of the author's intent and purpose before finally rejecting the MS. The **literary** quality of the work, its topicality and future possibilities are also **matters** to be considered. Maybe a **jewel** is hidden away under dirt and slime, and some cleaning up **might** yield a fortune.

A **good** editor should be able to take a quick prima facie decision on the basis of such a sampling. This is where his intuition works. There is an unwritten rule that what does not interest the editor cannot interest his readers, as he always carries his readers **alongwith** him.

A good number of **manuscripts could** be disposed of after a cursory reading, as said above. While returning the unaccepted material, one should see that it is returned neither too early nor too **late**. Sometimes, even before the author **has left** the office, the editor may have **arrived** at the decision that the MS. is not **going** to be useful for his purpose. But if the MS. comes bouncing back to the author the very next day, he will think the editor has **not** read it at all. **On** the other hand, if the editor sits pretty and does not convey his **decision** for months together, he will be pestered with unnecessary reminders and phone-calls. He must seem **fair** either way.

2.5.2 Second reading

If, **after** a cursory reading of a few pages here and there, the work seems promising, **then** comes the closer reading. Probably the MS. may have to be read more than **once**. **Fit**, to get acquainted with it **as** a whole, and then closely, to see what **it** calls **for** in terms of actual **editing**. It is the second reading, following the decision to (accept) the MS. for publication, that is crucial. The editor picks up the blue pencil **and begins** his work. In case of a book, as he goes on reading, he makes critical notes in the margin to refer back to the author for **re-working** the MS., if and where necessary. In regard to articles for publication in the journal, he may have to do the **entire** editorial work himself. The critical notes may read as follows, 'Diffuse, needs to be made sharp'—or 'Too sketchy, could be developed further'—or 'Repetitious, the idea already occurs on pages . . . ' etc. As the editor proceeds, he may correct **mistakes** in spelling, grammar and idiom, rephrase faulty sentences, cut down repetitions, prune the extraneous and the inept, sharpen whatever is diffuse and vague **and so** on. There might be ambiguities and awkward expressions that block communication; these will need rewriting by the editor himself or the author. All statements which are libellous, unfair, irresponsible and injudicious **should** be weeded out to guard against possible legal wrangles. Thus goes on the work, generally in several progressive stages, till the editor is fully satisfied.

2.5.3 The cardinal rule

The cardinal rule of all **editing** is that there should be no needless corrections, and the editor should not meddle with the author's opinions or ideas. His intrusion should be limited to one of language, style and presentation—to provide clarity, consistency, cogency and a better focus to the author's work. As for ideas, he **either** accepts or rejects the MS. **as** a whole.

2.5.4 Mss with special problems

Sometimes there might be an MS. which is weak, but is so well-written that its defects are hidden. Depending on the exigencies of the editor's needs, it may pass. There may also be cases where the content is good, but the presentation is bad, **even** atrocious. It is then for the editor to decide if it should be accepted or rejected. In case of acceptance, he may ask the author to rework the MS. and if the author cannot do justice to it, the editor should be prepared to do it himself.

An editor should be sure as to what he wants before putting the blue pencil to **the** paper. He should also have the confidence that he can carry the author with him in **all** that he does. Even when he is giving a better shape to the author's bad work, he should have the **humility** to feel that he is only subserving the author. The MS., **after** it has undergone the necessary **editing**, **should** be referred back to the author, and his **final approval** taken for its publication, before sending it to the copy editor.

Editing may seem a drudgery, a **thankless** job, sometimes inviting blame too. But there is a kind of spiritual satisfaction about it. Editing is like midwifery, bringing a new life into this world. Carelessly done, it may result in the death or undesirable disfigurement of the child, but if well done, the author is always grateful to the editor. Who knows, an MS. which has passed through the editor's hands today might **turn** out to be that **one-in-a-million** classic for **all** time to come!

2.6 SUMMING UP

It is universally believed that an author has to be his own editor. This is because any form of creativity involves the critical faculties of selection, arrangement, revision, etc. Therefore, as an author in the making, you should learn the art of **scrutinising** your own work as closely as possible.

There are two kinds of editing—copy editing and general editing. Whereas the former is of a mechanical nature (**checking** for grammatical accuracy, **spelling**, paragraphing, etc.), general editing is of a more fundamental nature in **that** it is concerned with precision and accuracy in the presentation of the central thesis.

Activity 2

Given below is a passage from *The Road* (Mulk Raj Anand, Sterling, Delhi), which needs editing. Read it **closely** to incorporate **such** editorial changes as punctuation marks, break up of **sentences**, paragraphing, spellings, use of capital letters, **etc.**

"after the first round of prayers **pandit** Suraj **Mani** felt that he had **been** constrained to **neglect** so **angust** a personality as a landlord Thakur Singh when the latter, had **come, into** the temple; so he carressed his white beard into the necessary dignity **and** essued out, his staff into his right hand; rosary into his left. The Sun was **breething** fire across the world; as it moved **angrily** over the planes into the **hills wich** divid Haryana from Rajasthan. Pandit Suraj **Mani** looked up at **Surya** for a moment and, then with-drawing his gaze quickly, preyed for mercy.

But as the flaming **heat** scotched his face, he knew that this God had no mercy that his anger was more intense them ever; and that the endless temper of the sun was about to **eat** up the world, which was full of bad deeds. Surely it had been said in the **puranic** holy texts that in the **kali** yog, the Sun would get more hot and bum the **universe** into ashes because the karma of sins must get its first reward. And the **gossip** that **panditji** had heard of the explozions of the suns energy, which had **poisoned** the water of the ocan, confirmed **him** in his prognostications. **Why**, the breaking of Dharam, by **Lambardar Dhooli** Singh and his followers **was** only one sign of the spreiding evil of this dark age; the sparks of heat **burnt** all over the priests face and covered **him** by a scowl of **hatrid** against **sinfull man-kind**. Landlord Thakur Singh and his son, Sajnu, were seated below the **pipal** tree, almost as if by the instinctive knowledge that the gods were on **there** side, they were waiting for the minister of **devine** wishes
Pandit Suraj Mani.

(Check your answer **with** that given at the end of the Unit)

2.7 ACTIVITIES: AIDS TO ANSWERS

Activity 1

There are two **kinds** of &ting—copy editing and general editing. While the former involves a close scrutiny bf the manuscript [with a view to preparing it for the ,printer), the latter is **concerned** with assessing the suitability of an MS. (in regard to its theme and **presentation**) for publication.

Activity 2

The corrected editorial **copy** is given below:

After the first round of prayers, Pandit Suraj Mani felt that he had been constrained to **neglect** so august a personality as Landlord Thakur Singh when the latter had come to the temple. So he caressed his white beard into the necessary dignity **and** issued out, his **staff** in his right hand, rosary in **the** left.

The sun was **breathing** fire across the world, as it moved angrily over the plains into the hills which divide Haryana from Rajasthan.

Pandit Suraj Mani **looked** up at **Surya** for a moment, and, then, **withdrawing** his gaze quickly, prayed for mercy. But, as the flaming heat scorched his face, he knew that this god had no mercy, that his anger was more intense than ever, and that the endless rancour of the sun was about to devour the world which was full of bad **deeds**. To be sure, it had been said in the **Puranic** holy books that, in the **Kali Yuga**, the sun would get hotter and burn the universe to ashes, because the **Karma** of sins must meet its reward. And the **rumours** that **Panditji** had heard of the **explosions** of the sun's energy, which had poisoned the waters of the **ocean**, **confirmed** him in his prognostications. **Why**, the violation of **Dharm** by **Lambardar Dhooli Singh** and his minions was only one sign of the spreading evil of this dark age. The sparks of heat ignited over the priest's face and covered it with a scowl of hatred against sinful mankind.

Landlord **Thakur Singh** and his son Sajnu were seated under the Rpal tree, almost as though by **the** instinctive knowledge that the gods were on their side. They were waiting for the minister of divine wishes, Pandit Suraj Mani.

2.8 GLOSSARY

You will find in the **glossary** a short list of the terms **used** in **this** Unit.

Ambiguities; These are obscurities (**e.g.** double meanings of a word or phrase, etc.) which interfere with the reader's understanding of a text.

Printer-publisher: **This** pertains to an early phase of publishing industry when the printer performed the dual **role** of **publishing** and **printing**.

Standard **spelling**; This ordinarily refers to the common **universal** spelling of a **word**. (British and American spellings differ from each other).