UNIT 4  EDITING FOR PRINT AND ONLINE MEDIA

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

Through this Unit our aim is to give you an idea of how the raw creative input by reporters is converted into a finished well tailored output. By the end of this Unit you should be able to:

• define news editing;
• describe the principles of editing;
• describe the functions of news editing;
• describe and discuss the problems encountered in news editing;
• describe the duties, responsibilities and qualities of a sub-editor; and
• edit a Copy.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In a newspaper, editing plays a pivotal role. A news item or a news story, as it is called, is written by reporters who are on endless assignments and never have the time. So they give a rough draft to the story. The sub-editor gives finesse to this draft and polishes it to perfection. What you see as a reader in your newspaper is the effort of the desk editors. The desk ensures that you can read your paper along with the morning tea. This unit will give you an idea of how the raw creative input is converted into a finished well tailored output.
4.1.1 What is Editing?

News stories come in from various sources. If you pick up your newspaper and just read the first page, you will find that it has stories which are credited to either individuals or news agencies like PTI, UNI, AFP, UPI, TASS and many more, or to the correspondent or reporter. These stories are tailored to the required shape and size by using the right kind of symbols and expressions with news sense in mind. And all this happens before they come to you. This process of checking stories for grammatical errors, syntax or sentence structure and style, facts and figures clarifying for easy understanding, and condensing for economy of space is editing.

It also means writing the headlines, paraphrasing the story as per the style book of the organization, writing an attractive lead and allotting the story to a particular page.

4.1.2 Why do We Need to Edit?

We need to edit because the first version is never perfect. The more you chisel the diamond, the sharper it gets. There are also other reasons listed below which will tell you of the need to edit.

- Because of lack of clarity in the writing the tone or mood may not be as it is intended to be. The story may not seem to be reader specific.
- There may be lack of space on the page and the story may be long. On the other hand there may be lots of space but the story may be short.
- Spelling mistakes need to be located and corrected.
- There could be grammatical errors. One would need to check the verbs, nouns, adverbs and other parts of speech for their positions and usage.
- Syntactical changes, if required would need to be made.
- Adhering to the rule book or style book of the newspaper is necessary. Checking and cross checking facts, numbers and names also has to be done.
- Writing headlines and subheadings, choosing appropriate pictures, and graphic representations need also to be done.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Space given below the question is for writing your answer.
   b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

i) Why is editing required?

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4.2 EDITING FOR DIFFERENT AREAS

Editing doesn’t mean deleting your words - it is actually a skilled exercise to align your grammar correctly. And it also means giving the final shape to a programme on radio, a television programme, an internet story or a picture for publishing and telecasting. Editing print copy is not the same as editing a web copy. The text must wrap correctly, the kerning and leading must be perfect, the style cannot be compromised with and all this to manage two extra words of hanging text. The television and radio editing means not only editing the script but also editing the audio and visual components by using softwares specially created for this task. Let’s take an insight into the editing processes for these media and photographs.

4.2.1 Television Editing

Editing is often done to correct mistakes, by cutting out the bad parts, and/or replacing them with good ones. This can be quite simple and may only involve cutting out a few seconds during which the participant made a mistake. It also can become quite challenging, especially if the retakes do not quite fit the rest of the recording, as to color temperature, background sounds, continuity, or field of view.

The most difficult, but most satisfying editing assignments are those in which you must build a show from a great many takes. In this case, the edit is the major production phase. This is especially true in EFP post production, when all takes are shot with a single camera to be combined later.

**On-Line and Off-Line:** Off-line editing produces a work print, a preliminary and usually lower-quality tape dubbed from the higher quality master. On-line editing produces that master copy that is used on the air or for dubbing off copies. The terms off-line and on-line don’t refer so much to the tape format used, but rather the intent of the edited product.

The major advantage of off-line editing is that you can take time for reviewing the unedited material and deciding where to cut, without tying up expensive equipment. With burn-in dubs (those with a window featuring time code numbers “burned into” the bottom of the frame), you can identify the exact spot where you’ll cut, and note these decisions on an editing shot list. Later, you can proceed with the actual editing.

Too many times, however, people start editing without having properly thought about the editing sequence. This can sometimes help to save time, but more often than not you will get lost in a maze of detail. In all but the most routine editing jobs, you will need to do an editing outline, a list of the desired event sequences and the necessary transitions.

4.2.2 Radio Editing

You must have listened to the radio and wondered how the sound comes into it. Well it is nothing but recording of the matter on tapes and transmission via radio waves. One of the advantages of working with reel-to-reel audiotape is that you can edit program material easily. You can remove mistakes and unwanted material from your program to form a cohesive, polished product. The editing process also will allow you to adjust the run time of a program by shortening or lengthening a taped segment. In addition, you may add taped material to another taped program through the editing process. The editing process consists of the most common method of editing audiotape ie. for the unwanted material to be cut out. Although this method
has been in place since the introduction of magnetic recording tape many years ago, the “cut and splice” technique is still the preferred editing method of the broadcast industry. The manual reel-to-reel tape edit is simple, requires no expensive or exotic equipment, and depending on the skill of the editor, can produce a clean and extremely accurate edit.

4.2.3 Web Editing

REMEMBER THE WEBSITE. We want the maximum number of readers to enjoy what we publish. It is already a fact that now more people read newspaper content online than in our newspapers. And it is also the case that more visitors arrive at our website via search engines and aggregators than any other route. It is therefore important, and likely to grow even more so, that when writing for the internet we “optimize” our copy so that the likes of Google can find articles and display them prominently. The easiest way to do this is to write headlines (and intros) that are “keyword-rich”. The sort of punning wordplay and vivid quotes that help make for an excellent, arresting headline on the printed page do not work online. On the internet, the priority for any headline is to inform search engines (and therefore, readers) what the article is about. Its language should, therefore, be concrete, not abstract, and contain full names. Thus “Brown will let Darling swing in the wind” is fine for the newspaper; online it would be better rendered as “Gordon Brown shuns Alistair Darling after Budget row”. (Courtesy: Telegraph, London)

Are you a frequent internet user? Do you like reading the news on the web? Does it attract your attention more than the hard copy newspaper? In any web content, designing plays a very important role. The parts of almost any kind of a document can be broken down into five main sections—Artwork, Titles, Body, Navigation, and Credits. Not every document will contain all these parts or may contain only some aspects of each. Let us try and understand each of these elements of web design.

- **Artwork:** Even before reading the headlines, readers are often drawn to the visuals on a page. Both the choice of images and their placement within a document provide information about the document, the purpose, and its organization.

- **Titles:** Typical headlines and titles are larger and more prominent than other text. These visual cues signal the start of a book, a magazine, an article, or a major division in a publication such as a chapter of a book or a sub-section of a report.

- **Body:** Body copy is the main text found in the publications we read. It is the text of the stories and articles. Body copy is not the headlines. Beyond the actual words, the body of a document uses paragraph and character emphasis and organizational elements to aid in the reading and comprehension of the material.

- **Navigation:** Longer publications such as books, newsletters, and annual reports need some way to help readers find specific information within the document. From a table of contents to page numbers, sectional elements provide a means of navigating through and finding specific portions of a document.

- **Credits:** Different types of publications have credits or other informational elements that contain such items as the name of the advertiser, publisher, or other entity, an address, a logo, copyright information, and other notices. The number of parts and where it appears varies by publication type.
4.2.4 Photo Editing

Pictures submitted for publication in the newspapers and magazines have to be edited to fit into the layout of the page, and also the unnecessary portions cut off, which the photographer might have added in the actual composition. The competent photo editor’s job is to keep the essence of the subject intact. This reduction process, keeping the essential parts of the photographs intact, is called cropping. Since the photographers are emotionally involved in shooting their pictures, they might think whatever they have added in a picture would be published. This aspect is left to the judgment of the photo editor, when the final composition of the photograph for publication is made.

It is the job of the photo editor to select the best photograph which tells the story on its own. The photo editor edits it to suit the space in the page without destroying or distorting the essence of the picture, and gives it a good display. It is not always to the liking of the photographer, but the photo editor has to do his job. A good photo editor always takes the photographers into confidence, holding frequent discussions with them from the time the assignments are given to them till the final outcome of the photograph on the photo editor’s desk. It is the photo editor’s duty to give the photographers ideas about the picture possibilities. While the photographers are in the dark room with the enlarger, he joins them in composing the picture on the easel board, which saves a lot of time, and leaves no ill feeling with the photographers. What most of the photographers hate is when the picture is trimmed and edited in their absence.

Computer applications in photo editing: The latest technology enables one to use sophisticated equipment for photo editing. The selected negatives are scanned, the contrast adjusted, and the picture cropped on the computer video display terminal as required. Then, the image is directly transferred to the page. The elimination of the intermediary procedures, used in the conventional system until now, avoids handling of the negatives or transparencies, thus making sure that the reproduction is of a high class. A very important aspect of such a method is that the picture quality in terms of tones, density, color sharpness, and so on, can be reproduced to near perfection, which was not always possible in the previous conventional methods. This also applies to the ‘Photo Fax’, where photographs are faxed from outstation, and are transmitted directly to the computer, from where all necessary adjustments can be made. Photos can be stored and recalled on the computer as and when required.

Photo editing is one of the most powerful tools at the photographer’s disposal. In classic photography, the term photo editing can refer to everything between processing the film in chemicals and seeing the final print. In modern digital photography most of the processing magic happens in the computer. This is good news for people without a studio and darkroom. Before digital technology came along, there was a limited amount that could be done using an enlarger with filters, masks and other manual devices; but the era of film and smelly chemicals seems to be drawing to a close. Nowadays we have computer software which we can use to achieve far more—ranging from simple improvements to dramatic effects. Photo editing techniques can be applied to all photos, whether taken by a digital camera or scanned from the negative or print from a film camera. The software which is used by most professional photographers is Adobe Photoshop. There are essentially two versions - the professional one which is very costly and Photoshop Elements which does most of the things an enthusiast could wish for at about one tenth the price.
4.3 SUB EDITING OR COPY EDITING

Copy editing is the editorial work that an editor does to make changes and improvements to a story. This is for the print media. Let us see what it is.

The “5Cs” summerise the copy editor’s job:

a) clear
b) correct
c) concise
d) comprehensible
e) consistent.

These emphasize “make it say what it means and mean what it says”.

Copy refers to the written or typewritten text for publication. An editor who does the task of refining the copy is called the copy editor or sub editor. He renders the text to flow sensibly, fairly and accurately so that it poses no legal problems for the publisher.

Copy editors are also responsible for selecting which news agency’s wire copy the newspaper will use and for rewriting it to house style. Often, the copy editor is the only person, other than the author, to read an entire text before publication.

4.3.1 Good vs Bad Editing

Robert Gredy of The New Yorker said that the work of a good editor, like the work of a good teacher does not reveal itself directly. It is reflected in the accomplishments of others. There are no good or bad writers; there are only good or bad editors. Editing is “quality control” for the written word. A good editor is one who communicates effectively with the writer, consults about the theme, beefs up description, rearranges sequences, checks facts, corrects the language and conforms to the newspaper’s style. A bad editor does none of the above but just checks the copy for spelling mistakes.

4.3.2 Barriers Removed by Editing

- People do not want to read a document which is messy
- A structure which is hard to follow is an excuse to stop reading further
- Too much or too little content
- Bad headlines
- Inappropriate language
- Long, complicated sentences
- Lack of headlines and subheadings
- An inappropriate tone of voice
- Factual errors leave a bad taste in the mouth
- Legal repercussions as per rulings of Indian Penal Code or Press Council of India to be kept in mind
- Defamation liability to be removed
Certain redundancies should also be avoided while editing. Many a times we describe planes which are “totally destroyed” or a meeting where we “assemble together”. Remember when we refer to something as having got destroyed it means complete destruction. So the word totally is not required. Similarly, when you assemble, it means coming together and the word assemble need not be written. Such needless repetitions are called redundancies. Beware of these redundancies. Here is a list of the most common redundancies seen in the newspapers. You may add your own to the list:

- Absolutely necessary
- Advance planning
- Ask the question
- Assemble together
- Cancelled out
- Carbon copy
- Cooperate together
- Exactly identical
- Necessary requirements
- Postpone until later
- Temporarily suspended
- True facts
- Honest truth
- Fair and just
- Fall down
- Friend of mine

### 4.3.3 Role of a Sub-Editor

In the news business, presentation is everything and the correct use of language is its cornerstone. The sub-editor is responsible for ensuring every story that goes to print is in clear language that maintains the credibility and reputation of the organisation they work for. Many of you will want to become sub-editors. Come let’s find out the role of the sub-editor. These are listed below:

- Editing copy to remove spelling mistakes and grammatical errors;
- Rewriting material so that it flows or reads better and adheres to the house style of a particular publication;
- Ensuring that a story fits a particular word count by cutting or expanding material as necessary;
- Writing headlines that capture the essence of the story or are clever or amusing;
- Writing stand-firsts or sells (brief introductions which sum up the story);
- Liaising with reporters or journalists to clarify facts and details about a story;
- Editing press releases or reports;
- Compiling routine information, such as tables of sports results or financial data;
- Checking facts and stories to ensure they are accurate, do not break the law or go against the publication’s policy;
• Cropping photos and deciding where to use them for best effect; Writing the captions for pictures;
• Discussing concerns with editors;
• Proofreading complete pages produced by other sub-editors;
• Working to a page plan to ensure that the right stories appear in the correct place on each page;
• Laying out pages and, depending on the nature of the role, playing a part in page design;
• Adding last minute news stories;
• Keeping up to date with issues, e.g. by reading publications.
• Gate keeping – selection of a story which is print-worthy
• Paraphrasing and Rewriting

Some common Proof reading symbols are also necessary for sub-editors. These are as follows:

4.3.4 Qualities of a Sub-Editor

The production of a newspaper calls for undivided attention of 200 to 300 people in different departments, as it is a delicate and complex process. There is tension since a deadline is to be met. In a news agency, the deadline is ‘now’. Amidst this tense atmosphere, the sub-editor has to perform his job meticulously. He should possess certain qualities to discharge his duties efficiently. Some of these qualities of a copy editor/sub-editor are:

Calmness : Be calm and composed, come what may. You should not get excited when a big story breaks – be it a disaster, calamity, the assassination of a big political leader or the collapse of a government.

Decisive : Take quick and correct decisions. The editorial department has no place for indecision.
Non-partisan : Never take sides; be non-partisan.

Memory : Have a sharp memory for counter-checking facts, if necessary.

Grasp : Size up the situation as it unfolds, and estimate its relevance.

Know your reader : Know the particular readership. This means you should engage one hand with subbing, and the other with the pulse of the reader.

Self-confidence : Have confidence enough to correct a bad copy written by anyone, even the senior most reporter or the paper’s editor.

Mature : Be mature enough to correct only bad copy, and not just make changes for the sake of changing.

Skeptical : Do not accept anything at face value. You should approach everything as a source of potential error.

Knowledge : Be a Jack of all trades, because a sub-editor handles a wide range of stories (from killing, to all prices, to a satellite launch). You are required to have some knowledge about these, including how these compared with the past events, how the names of different nationalities are spelt. A good editor should store most of the information as it comes across, and search for more.

Stability : Have enough stability to work under pressure.

4.3.5 Duties of a Sub-Editor

Every sub-editor had a set of duties which are not a part of the rules and regulation book but are still there to enhance his professional performance. These are unwritten duties, more ethical in nature. As a sub-editor you have to remember them whenever you sit down to edit the story. With the passage of time they will get so engrained in the mind that you will not even have to remember them. These duties are to simplify the write up: Rewrite the story in the common man’s language. Replace difficult words with easy ones. Shorten sentences so that it becomes easy to read.

Clarify the story: As a sub-editor you will have to give clarity to the story by making the story readable in writing style. Remove ambiguous words, and change sentence patterns to remove fog index, which is the measure of abstraction and complexity of words. Abbreviations, if less known should be elaborated and popular elaborations can be abbreviated.

Verify the facts: Be 200% sure of the facts in the write up you are editing. Check and cross check before finalizing the story.

Avoid sensationalizing the strong sentiments in the write up: Never play up or exaggerate facts in a news story. It not only puts a doubt on the authenticity of the write up but also reflects badly on the ethics and reputation of the organization.

Cut out on gender bias in the news item: The write up should neither be too anti-women or anti-men. Also objectionable pictures of women and comments on them should be avoided.

Remove leanings of class, caste, religion and creed from the story: Any write up should not instigate negative feelings for any class, creed, caste or religion in society. Also the story should not have obvious and apparent leanings to any of the above.
Keep stories akin to the policies of the newspaper: While writing and editing a news story the policies of the organization on various issues of importance should be kept in mind.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: a) Space given below the question is for writing your answer.
      b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

i) What is the difference between a good and a bad editor?
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ii) What are the qualities of a good sub-editor?
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4.4 HOW TO EDIT A COPY

A news story must play upon the event reported therein. Ideally, read every story, preferably thrice—one for familiarization, once while you edit, and the third time to check your work. If the story has no glaring problems, and if you fully understand it, you would be ready to edit it. Now, you are concerned with spelling, punctuation, grammar, consciousness of expression, smoothness of writing, general accuracy and comprehensibility.

Format: A news story is divided into two parts—the opening para called the “intro” (introduction) or the “lead”, and the body. The lead describes, simply and briefly, what happened. The body documents and elaborates the lead. Adequate attention should be paid to the lead, the most vital part of the story. Written in a single sentence, it should grab the reader and compel him to read the body. Normally, the lead is in about 25 words, or may be less. At the maximum, it should be limited to 40 words. The intro should be concise and crisp. It should not meander or puzzle the reader, but summarize the story. Details should be dispersed and blended in the subsequent paragraphs.

There is a famous example of an eye-catching introduction:

“James Wilson lit a cigarette while bathing his feet in gasoline. He may live.”

This is a masterpiece of economy of words in writing. It tells the whole story at once: the careless stupidity of the act, the swift act of retribution and the terrible consequences, all conjured up in our minds in vivid detail.
In a sense, we do not need to read on but we all would. We would want to know more about James Wilson, why he was soaking his feet in gasoline, where he was performing this act, and so on. And, all this would be told in subsequent paragraphs, in a logical order. This particular example is what is called a “teasing” intro, for it arouses our curiosity and makes us read on.

**Opening para:** Conventionally, the news story has followed the “inverted pyramid” structure. The most significant information is placed at the top, the story’s beginning and other details follow in their order of importance. Thus the story tapers to smaller and smaller details, until it disappears. It may begin with the five Ws and one H, i.e., the who-what-why-when-where and how. Basically, a news story should answer what, when and where. The answers should find place in the opening paragraph. The three other questions – who, why and how – do not necessarily arise in all the news copy. In case they do, the answers are accommodated in the subsequent paragraphs. Each succeeding paragraph should add an essential detail without being dependent in content or style on what follows.

The inverted pyramid style enables:

i) a news story to be self-contained, even if paragraphs are deleted at the bottom due to space shortage [consequently, a coherent story is left at each point where it could be cut];

ii) a hurried reader to skip over many stories in a short time by just reading the opening paragraphs [those with greater interest could read a story completely];

iii) a sub-editor, to write the headline in the gist in the first few paragraphs; and

iv) a sub-editor to change the order of paras or insert new material, even after the matter has been sent to the press for composing.

If the news is not in the opening paragraph, trace out where it is buried. Bring it to the top, and also locate its supporting details. If there are two important news points or angles that vie for the top spot, assess and evaluate which one is better and catchier. This could call for rewriting the entire news item.

### 4.5 **EDITOR’S TOOL BOX**

A copy editor must have aids which are indispensable to editing. Often you will come across mistakes both factual and grammatical, which you need to correct. For this the copy editor will require a set of tools, the lack of which may lead to the loss of valuable time while subbing the copy. These aids are indispensable. Often, you may come across problems of spelling and facts, arising out of an average day’s handling of the news. You should focus on the errors, and correct them. All this can be done with the help of some tools which should always be handy with you.

As a budding journalist and a future sub-editor you should be aware that there are standards set by responsible news organizations for the guidance of their staff and by news agencies for their members and clients. These are available as booklets and are given to an employee when he or she joins.

Editors write stylebooks, copyeditors use them and reporters hate them. Probably they curb the independence of writing and reporting. Style books work as authority to usage but it cannot be a substitute for the hard work, acquired skills and natural artistry of the writer.
Dictionary and Thesaurus

These are the Bible for any sub-editor. Remember to keep a dictionary and a thesaurus handy at all times. Good editors always keep a pocket sized dictionary and Roget’s Thesaurus in their bags.

A dictionary explains the meanings and a thesaurus gives synonyms to all possible listed words. They will help you greatly in sub-editing and re-writing. A thesaurus will give you numerous alternatives both easy and difficult to choose from. It will help you to write better.

Some Do’s and Don’ts

Remember to break up long quotes where several sentences run together.

Avoid the gratuitous use of “woman” as in “a woman doctor/a woman Army officer/ a woman scientist”. The person should simply be described as a doctor/Major/ scientist: the use of her full name and the ensuing text will make it clear that we are talking about a woman.

Similarly, we do not make gratuitous reference to a person’s ethnicity or sexual orientation.

Companies, groups and organisations etc are inanimate. They take “that” or “which”, depending on the syntax, and not “who”. They take a singular verb. (But Sport uses plural verbs for teams).

Quotes must be accurate. While it is permissible to clear up illiteracies it is not permissible to alter words or sense. Inevitably, some quotes will include words disapproved of by this style guide. That they are within quotation marks makes it clear, however, that the words are not ours.

Yesterday. Increasingly, as the distinction between publishing the newspaper and producing the website fades, we will stop using such words as “yesterday” and “today” in copy except when necessary to avoid confusion or to promote exclusive stories. When we do use them, they should be put in the right place. Many introductions and captions are spoilt by the misplacing of these words, which makes the sentence sound like a translation from German.

Add a Note when something is correct but looks as though it may not be. Reporters can save news desk staff and production journalists (and themselves) much tedious secondary researching by noting unusual spellings or apparent contradictions in text.

4.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you read about editing and learnt the what, why and how of subediting and learnt to differentiate between good and bad editing. The unit also explained how editing for print is different from editing for radio, television and internet. You must have understood that for electronic media editing is a technical task whereas in the print media editing has a language orientation. The use of editor’s tools like style sheet, thesaurus, editing symbols and grammar books is stressed on. By now you will be able to reunite passages, edit teleprinter copies and correct printed copies. You also learnt to catch printed grammatical and factual errors in the newspapers. We now hope you will read the newspaper with a vigilant eye.
4.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1
i) Editing is required to give a final shape to the work; to check for errors of grammar, syntax and spellings.

Check Your Progress 2
i) A good editor beefs up descriptions, rearranges sequences, checks facts, corrects the language etc. A bad editor just checks the copy for spelling mistakes.

ii) The qualities of a good sub-editor are that s/he needs to be calm, decisive, non-partisan, confident and a mature person who knows his/her target readership and is knowledgeable.