

The Craft and Business of Language Editing and Copyediting

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This informative session compared freelancing with working as an employee of an author-services company. The first speaker, Katharine O'Moore-Klopf, shared her expertise as a freelance author's editor. She described the work of an author's editor as formatting; grammar, spelling, punctuation, and syntax; transitions between topics; and organization and logical flow. She said she works mostly with nonnative English speakers to help polish their language. As an author's editor, she reviews the publisher's in-house style sheet and instructions for authors, as well as recent publications in the journal, and edits according to the preferred style.

She warned that some authors copy material from previously published work and may not realize this is a violation of publishing ethics. In certain cultures, such copying is considered a proper way to provide background on a topic. However, the editor must explain this is not considered ethical in US publishing. Instead, authors should be encouraged to write the material in their own words and to cite articles correctly.

O'Moore-Klopf recommended staying in touch with previous clients and using social media to keep professional networks informed regarding the types of materials being edited, compliments from authors, and current work. In addition to blog posts and LinkedIn status updates, freelance editors should create business websites tailored to potential clientele. She emphasized that author's editors should not simply list their qualifications in a LinkedIn bio, Twitter account, or Facebook page. Rather, they should tell a story about how they can help their clients. An editor must not promise the manuscript will be published and should refer authors to translators if needed. According to O'Moore-Klopf, a good editor suggests corrections rather than simply querying the author and uses the communication method that works best for the author (email, Skype, etc).

Continuing professional education is vital for an author's editor and can include annual meetings like CSE's; web-based instruction; audio conferences; online courses from an editorial freelancers association; university editing certificate programs; reading science, editing, and publishing blogs; and webinars.

Kurt Spurlock talked about what it's like to work with a large author-services company. On the business side, because the company is responsible for finding customers, the amount of available work is not entirely within an editor's control. This means that papers to edit could sometimes be scarce, though establishing—and maintaining—relationships with customers is itself a lot of work and may not appeal to every editor. In addition, basic business interactions such as securing customer payments are taken care of by the company, and there is consistency in what editors are paid. Editors enjoy the reliability of a paycheck that arrives on time and an accounting department to handle problems. Technological advantages of working for a company are that it provides the website interface for authors and editors use the same portal for uploading and downloading manuscripts as authors use.

Because the editor follows a consistent style from paper to paper and author to author, it's easier to build up speed and develop skill. Editing style and scope are explicitly defined in agreements between the company and the author and the editor. Quality control involves consistency and following the company's standards. Doing good work for the company builds the editor's reputation, and quality and timeliness are emphasized. The company also acts as a buffer between author and editor—if the author is unhappy with the work done by the editor, the company will handle the author's complaints.

On behalf of second-language English speakers, an audience member spoke about concerns of cost and timeliness when using an editing service and suggested authors use a service such as Grammarly, which is inexpensive and easy to use. O'Moore-Klopf cautioned that such programs cannot understand the nuances of language and ideas that a human being can handle much better. Finally, O'Moore-Klopf was asked how she set the pace when working with many clients, and she replied, "I have many years of experience, so I know how fast I can edit." She offers to do two rounds of editing to limit costs and asks to see the manuscript first so she can make a ballpark estimate and let authors know what to expect.