

argument here," the editor can make the same point by saying, "Am having some trouble following argument here; please give example." The difference is subtle, but by taking some of the burden onto himself, the editor is less condemning and illustrates the reader's need.

Note the detail of Commins's comments. A less attentive and considerate editor might dash off marginal exclamations like "vague," "need more," "anticlimactic"; instead Commins gives the author the reasons and arguments for all his suggestions. This leaves the author very little room to ignore or disagree with them, helping Commins get what he wants. I have seen editors scribble "right?" in the margin next to a questionable passage, with no explanation for the query. This seldom yields the response the editor wants. What if the author answers "yes" and gives no further evidence or authority? Worse yet, what if the author, bothered by the question, answers "no"?

Effective querying elicits the response the editor wants, and he must direct the author to it. After all, if the author has been vague or confused in his first draft, there is no reason to believe that, undirected, he will improve substantially the second time around. Thus the query must be carefully worded. Take, for example, this garbled paragraph:

In the nineteenth century, tuna was strictly chicken feed. This was not true of salmon, which was canned and widely available. One year the sardine catch fell short, and a sardine canner hit on the idea of putting up tuna. Canned tuna caught on immediately.

If the editor queries marginally "confusing; please clarify," how can he guarantee a less confusing rewording? But what if the editor says, "Hard to follow. Do you mean salmon and sardines were both commonly canned and a sardine canner, lacking sardines and salmon, used tuna? Please add explanatory sentence"? Here the editor has laid the groundwork for the author, and if the author answers the query, the editor will probably get enough information to make the passage comprehensible or, at the least, editable.

And so, in the end, we return to the author-editor exchange, that long and rewarding process that results in the best book possible. How much work that takes from the editor depends on what kind of manuscript he has received from the author, but the more effective the editor, the less his work will show, no matter how much he has put into the process.

Editors are not authors, nor do they wish to be. What the best of editors wishes to be is the perceptive, demanding, energetic, and patient prober who can devote his particular talents and skills to the enterprise of working with authors to publish good books.

Line Editing

The Art of the Reasonable Suggestion

John K. Paine

JOHN PAINE is the senior manuscript editor for the NAL/Dutton wing of Penguin USA.

Ms. Waxman's goal in line editing is "drawing out the best book possible." John Paine describes some of the most effective techniques and principles he uses as a working manuscript editor to achieve that high purpose in his short but sagacious essay.

Believing line editing to be "the art of the reasonable suggestion," Mr. Paine deems it essential that an editor learn yet another art to make the first one work with maximum effectiveness: "the art of communication." He points out "two features in any editorial note that are paramount in building editor-author rapport. One is that an editor state, continually, what she likes about a work. . . . Second, the language employed should be that of a helpmeet."

Mr. Paine details ways in which a helpful manuscript editor can stimulate "a creative response" in an author. "This is what an editor truly wants, that an author consider a point and fashion her own original response. This is what leads to a better book."

Line Editing

The Art of the Reasonable Suggestion

A line editor performs a useful role as an author's critical first reader. Rare is the manuscript that does not profit from the benign shaping and trimming that hands-on editing provides. On the other hand, even an author eager to please his publisher cannot help but be dismayed when a manuscript returns with page after page of marginal notes, sentences reconfigured, lines crossed out, and—who is this guy?—entirely new words or phrases introduced into a work he had considered finished, pristine. Because of this, a line editor has to learn early on an essential asset: the art of communication.

Before proceeding to the different levels of suggestions a line editor makes, I'd like to point out two features in any editorial note that are paramount in building editor-author rapport. One is that an editor state, continually, what she *likes* about a work. This is essential, for any author is going to be sensitive to criticism, and blast after negative blast raises the specter of the editor as arrogant, know-it-all jerk. Second, the language employed should be that of a helpmeet. My suggestions are rife with such phrases as "it seems," "you may want to consider," "perhaps a better tack is," etc. In this way an author does not feel threatened, leading to a wary but open-minded assessment of the note, which is precisely what an editor desires.

Conveying to an author why his material may be better emended takes various forms. Starting at the broadest level, changes of the sweeping structural variety are often best suggested at lunch or over the phone. This gives the author the chance to toss back and forth possible new avenues for larger-scale revisions. Sometimes an editor decides that writing an overall letter will work better, since the full scope of an idea is often better conveyed when written down. In this sort of letter, general observations of perceived problem areas can be followed by open-ended suggestions of remedies. The word *open-ended* is key here, since an author almost invariably is going to have fresher, more creative solutions than her editor.

A more in-depth approach may be better yet. The fact is, sometimes an editorial letter setting forth general ideas has the effect of leaving the author in the lurch. Yes, now I know what you don't like, but you haven't shown me, really, how to go about making it better. An author may go off in a wholly different direction that does not help the original problem. For this reason, I usually adopt a more detailed approach. Problems discussed in

general in a cover letter are then supplemented by notes written on specific ms. pages throughout the manuscript. In this way an author can attack an overall problem step by step—if he so chooses. For instance, let's say a political writer uses too much interview material, to the point that the lengthy quotations swamp the narrative's direction. In this case, a series of editorial notes could point out specific places where interviews could be cut to short excerpts backing up a narrator's summary of a point. In this system the author can still disregard any given suggestion. But at least she has the chance to consider if a detailed suggestion will help a larger problem.

This secondary type of note is useful especially for building stronger characters. Brief suggestions—two to four sentences—are typed at the top or bottom of a manuscript page, with arrows drawn to the specific action that has spurred the note. Weakly drawn characters constitute one of the most common failings of fiction writers, and continual notes from an editor can go a long way toward helping the author face what in fact he wants from a character. Egged on by the sheer number of innocuous suggestions, an author can not only insert new material in these places, but go on to recast a better-rounded figure altogether. Seeing an author fly off on his own wing like this is, of course, an editor's ultimate desire.

Such marginal notes also help in trimming a manuscript. Unfortunately for authors, one of a line editor's primary functions is cutting away deadwood. This area ranges from simple trimming of unnecessary adverbs and adjectives all the way to deletions of entire paragraphs and even pages at a stretch. Obviously, an editor had better be ready to supply cogent explanations for such large-scale action. And if a few sentences in a margin won't be enough, a half- or full-page note can be clipped to the ms. page, explaining why the deleted section is hindering the narrative's drive. One genre in which such block cuts are often made is true crime. Most of these authors are newspaper reporters. Their strength is in gathering information (as in "hunter-gatherer," I'm afraid); their weakness is in composing cohesive, well-constructed chapters, let alone parts or the book as a whole. Whole pages of minutia, often courtroom related, have to be stripped away so that the story of the leading detective, say, or murderer, maintains strong forward momentum. Continual editorial suggestions pointing out the need to concentrate on narrative threads help these authors see the forest for the trees.

Another form of suggestion is helpful in a lesser field of line editing, that of large-scale grammatical work. Early on in a manuscript, a series of long notes can pinpoint specific stylistic deficiencies that will be corrected throughout the book. The note could address the first instance of passive construction, say, or redundancy or excess verbiage—to name several common problems. Taking the length needed to inform the author fully, the

editor sets forth the principle(s) of stronger style on which she is acting in making these changes continually. After reading such a prefatory note, the author may not agree to this sort of change in every instance, but at least she understands why it is being repeatedly made. For instance, let's say an author is drawn to using participial phrases rather than indicative verbs. The manuscript reads: "He turned his head, lifting the blackjack from the low shelf and slamming it on the counter." With a note—"See attached page"—I would explain why such construction is weaker than the use of active verbs, the engine of strong prose. The stronger sentence is: "Turning, he lifted the blackjack from the low shelf and slammed it on the counter." This relegates the minor introductory business to its place and stresses the tension of the twin pieces of connected action. Such changes don't have to be made inflexibly in the manuscript, but in this case the author went along with 98 percent of these changes—because the reason why was explained up front.

On an even smaller scale, finally, a common notation that lets the author know why an editor is making emendations concerns word or phrase substitution. Even a careful author can fall into a common trap: words and phrases used too often to describe similar actions and especially emotions. If an editor lightly circles the word at the point he feels it is growing stale and then marks "overused" in the margin, then every time this word is substituted for, the author knows why. If he is sloppy enough to use a distinctive word twice within a given section, two light circles and checks in the margin explain a substitution. As always, the purpose is simply to make the author realize that his editor is not interested in rewriting the book.

If a line editor employs enough communication to assure the author that the criticism raised again and again is meant to help, not belittle, her prose, a creative response is stimulated. This is what an editor truly wants, that an author consider a point and fashion her own original response. This is what leads to a better book.

The Role of the Editorial Assistant

Casey Fuetsch

CASEY FUETSCH began her career as an assistant to three very patient editors at the Literary Guild. She has since become a senior editor in the trade division at Doubleday, where she has acquired and edited a variety of books, including When Heaven and Earth Changed Places, A Special Kind of Hero, After the Ball, and The Sound of a Miracle. She works with novelists Valerie Sayers, David James Duncan, and Sarah Bird, among others.

The answer to the question "What does an editorial assistant do?" is "Everything!" Everything from being first reader of almost all submissions to finding shortcuts through the corporate bureaucratic maze, keeping track of production schedules (and telling the authors about them, too), line editing, locating missing unsigned contracts and misplaced manuscripts, requesting payments for authors, and just about anything else a harried editor might need. In return, a wise editor will train the editorial assistant in the intricacies of building a list until one beautiful day the editorial assistant becomes an associate editor with a list of his or her own.

Wise authors who want to advance their careers should realize that working well with an editorial assistant is just about as important as working with the editorial assistant's boss. "The day I began working for [the editor], seventeen authors called to welcome me. They asked about my background, they said they hoped to meet me soon, and generally they showed me so much respect and consideration that I thought for sure they were mistaking me for someone important. These people were awfully nice.

Copy editors are, for the most part, unsung. We do this work because we love ideas, we love language, we love books. We don't expect to see our names up in lights. But if an author thinks enough of our contribution to mention us in the acknowledgments, it is a kindness we accept with gratitude and pleasure. We copy editors know what we contribute—silently, almost always anonymously—to the finished book, but we do not fool ourselves. The author is the hero.

Line Editing

Drawing Out the Best Book Possible

Maron L. Waxman

MARON L. WAXMAN is the editorial director of HarperReference at HarperCollins. The former executive director of book development at Book-of-the-Month Club, she has taught editing in the publishing programs at both the City University of New York and New York University and has lectured at many publishing and writers' conferences.

Ms. Waxman's clear, practical essay is nothing less than a comprehensive short course in the basic, essential principles and skills of line editing (also known as manuscript editing).

A believer in Maxwell Perkins's dictum that "an editor does not add to a book. At best he serves as a handmaiden. . . . In the end an editor can get only as much out of an author as the author has in him," Ms. Waxman offers her own definition of the working relationship between the manuscript editor and the author: ". . . a long and continuing exchange . . . of questions asked and answers given until both author and editor believe they have produced . . . the best book possible . . . the book in which the author says what he has to say as clearly, as forcefully, and as gracefully as he can. It is the goal of all editing, and most particularly manuscript editing, to achieve this end."

In the course of her essay Ms. Waxman offers sound advice on such vital matters as the difference between editing and rewriting, questions of clarity, coverage (providing sufficient information), organization (presentation of material in a way that can be followed), and tone (addressing the readers who will be most interested in the book). In addition she explains how to handle such technical aspects of manuscript editing as the analysis of the

manuscript before the editor begins to work on it and the proper and most effective way to query an author.

Ms. Waxman concludes by reminding writers that "editors are not authors, nor do they wish to be. What the best of editors wishes to be is the perceptive, demanding, energetic, and patient prober who can devote his particular talents and skills to the enterprise of working with authors to publish good books."

Line Editing

Drawing Out the Best Book Possible

In many authors' dreams there is an editor who sits at a desk, hunched over a mass of manuscript. The editor leafs through page after page, discarding some, furiously editing and reworking others. Finally, after days of work, a finely wrought book emerges from this mass, much as Michelangelo's *Moses* grew out of a block of marble. This dream picture is the legacy of Maxwell Perkins, Saxe Commins, and a handful of other mighty editors. The harsh truth is that before we can discuss manuscript editing seriously, we must brush aside this dream. Maxwell Perkins's own words give us the reality of manuscript editing. "An editor does not add to a book," Perkins told an editing class at New York University. "At best he serves as a handmaiden. . . . In the end an editor can get only as much out of an author as the author has in him."*

In this process of extraction the editor does not work alone. Manuscript editing is a long and continuing exchange between editor and author of questions asked and answers given until both author and editor believe they have produced a good book—not necessarily the best book ever, but the best book possible. The best book possible is the book in which the author says what he has to say as clearly, as forcefully, and as gracefully as he can. It is the goal of all editing, and most particularly manuscript editing, to achieve this end.

The Editor as Handmaiden

In practice, manuscript editing has very little to do with changing actual words on pages of paper. Weak writing almost always indicates weak

*A. Scott Berg, *Max Perkins: Editor of Genius* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1978), p. 6.

thinking or weak structure. Thus as the editor reads through the manuscript, the questions he keeps in mind at all times are:

Is the author's purpose evident?

Do the readers have the information they need to follow the narrative or argument or recipe?

Is the narrative or argument or recipe laid out in the clearest manner?

Are the level of information and tone of voice appropriate for the intended readers of the book?

Boiled down, these questions can be stated as clarity, coverage, organization, and tone. They are the principle concerns of the manuscript editor. Once they are right, the problems of language, if any, often resolve themselves.

An interruption

Like all crafts, editing requires some training and discipline. Here are three points to bear in mind as you prepare to begin editing.

First, manuscript editors do not read for pleasure, no matter what their friends may think. The manuscript editor must train himself to read uncomfortably, to nag, to question, to probe, not to give the author the benefit of the doubt. If you ever find yourself reading for pleasure when you are supposed to be editing, put down your pencil—in fact, you probably already have—and enjoy yourself. See how the book comes out. Then go back, pencil in hand, and edit, noting all the little complaints and comments you withheld for the pleasure of reading.

Second, editing is not rewriting. Many times it would be easier for the editor to rewrite tangled and unclear passages, using the author's manuscript as a primary source. But that is not editing; rewriting is an entirely different job. Keep in mind Perkins's words: "An editor does not add to a book." The editor must find a way to draw the words from the author.

Third, remember that you are the first reader of the book. Your response and impressions are the first chance the author has to see how a reader will respond to the book. This is one of your best tools in editing, so sharpen your ability to read like a reader. If you are confused, distracted, or let down, it is likely that other readers may also be. In the politest editorial manner, let the author know.

Now to the principle concerns.

Clarity

Above all the reader must be able to understand what the author is trying to accomplish, what her purpose is in writing the book.

A manila folder is a helpful aid in keeping that purpose firmly in mind. Before I begin editing a nonfiction manuscript, I put all the descriptive information on the book into this folder—the proposal, with cover letter if that has additional information; the table of contents; the introduction or preface; the author's biography or curriculum vitae. This folder stays on my desk throughout the editing, to be referred to when necessary.

I once edited a comprehensive book on attracting birds to the backyard. Each chapter was exhaustive in its detail, but, strangely, all the author's instructions did not seem to add up to anything. I just could not figure out why anyone should be doing all this. Consulting the manila folder, I saw that the author was an active environmentalist. With great force and sense of purpose, her proposal stated that in this book she wanted to alert homeowners, no matter how little land they had, to what they as individuals could do to preserve bird species and protect the environment for both birds and people. Nowhere in the book, however, was this urgent voice heard. I suggested that the author incorporate the assumptions and values of the proposal into the introductory chapter of the book. When she added this material, the book took on a purpose and offered a powerful reason to get out and undertake the time-consuming tasks the author had described.

In novels, particularly those that rely heavily on plot, editors often reverse this manila folder process and while editing compile a diary for the characters. What was the dazzling young actress wearing when she went for her first audition? Was it the same black Lycra miniskirt in which she was found murdered that evening? In biographies some editors keep the subject's vital statistics at hand—birthdate, important milestones, names and ages of family members. In this way the editor can be sure that, through some slip, the subject does not marry at age nine or that her children do not change names in the course of the book.

The editor must always keep the author on track. Here, in miniature, is an example of how an author can go astray.

The Sailor states the two main concerns of the author's body of work, one of only two novels by Mariner to be written in the second person (*The Wave* is the other); a speculation on the meaning of the sea in coastal countries that grows into a full-blown metaphor; and an examination of the life of the sailor, told in numbing day-to-day detail.

In this paragraph the writer had a very clearly stated idea, but she was distracted and wandered off to another thought, which is decorated with a parenthetical phrase. By the time the reader gets to the first semicolon, he has forgotten what he came for—"the two main concerns" of line 1. As an aside, the punctuation here only adds to the confusion. If the editor tries to fix the sentence by fiddling with the words, clarity is unlikely to result. Without changing a word, however, the sentence can be brought into line:

The Sailor states the two main concerns of the author's body of work: a speculation on the meaning of the sea in coastal countries that has grown into a full-blown metaphor and an examination of the life of the sailor, told in numbing day-to-day detail. It is interesting that *The Sailor* is one of only two books by Alice Mariner to be written in the second person, the other being *The Wave*.

In a sentence or two this kind of meandering is fairly apparent, but in a book whole paragraphs and chapters often roam off, abandoning the reader. The editor is the vigilant guide, always urging the author back to the path. This does not mean that there can be no attractive detours, only that they should be clearly recognized as such.

Coverage

Have you ever read a mystery in which a totally unexpected character, with totally unexpected motives, turns out to be the villain? Most readers find this kind of deus ex machina resolution disappointing. By the same token, a cook up to his elbows in the preparation for a dinner party is none too happy if one of the steps in the recipe calls for an ingredient not mentioned on the ingredient list.

Coverage, or sufficient information, is another major concern of the line editor. I have edited two biographies in which the authors neglected to state the birthdates of the subjects. Now I immediately look for this information. Why was I taken by surprise the first time it happened? Because manuscript editors are too often bound up in the text, busy ransacking it for problems. It is much harder to stand back from the text and look for what is not there. This is, however, one of the most important disciplines the manuscript editor can develop. The primary concern is that all people and terms be adequately identified and defined. Sixth-graders tackle this problem by starting many papers, "The dictionary defines 'absolutism' as . . ." More sophisticated writers try to avoid this kind of unimaginative opening, but in so doing often omit basic information. The editor must constantly be on the lookout for these omissions.

Once I edited a draft manuscript that carefully described, step by step, how to build a deck and a patio and never defined either or told the difference between the two. Recently an article on the front page of the *New York Times* was headlined 10 OF 12 [SOVIET REPUBLICS] PLEDGE SUPPORT [FOR AN ECONOMIC UNION] but did not mention the names of either the ten supporting republics or the two opposing ones. Again these are examples writ small. The manuscript editor can be faced with similar omissions spread over the course of a 150,000-word book and must train himself to ask, as he turns each page, "Has anything necessary or important been left out? Has the author covered the most recent developments in the field?"

There is, of course, the other side of the coin—too *much* information. Writing is a selective process in which the author chooses from a mass of material that which best creates the story, whether fiction or nonfiction. However, in gathering material, the author sometimes gets too close to it and cannot part with a scrap. At this point the editor must step in and gently prune so that the reader will not be lost in a thicket of information. This is not to advocate a Bauhaus severity. Obviously there is room for an aside, for a bit of colorful if not vital information, for a graceful description or a humorous allusion, but the reader should not have to track through all the writer's undigested thoughts and research. One editor tells of a striking set piece in a novel he was working on, a jewel that sparkled but distracted rather than illuminated. In the original draft it appeared in the opening chapter. Out of place there, it was moved, at the editor's suggestion, to a later chapter. With each draft the scene shifted to a yet later chapter, until at last both editor and author decided to save it for the next book. What is important in every book is the information needed to complete it or the narrative thrust to keep it moving, not every piece of information, no matter how fascinating, or every beautifully crafted passage.

Two other factors have to be taken into consideration in considering the content of a book: accuracy and balance. The editor must continually test and question what he is reading. Is it complete? Up-to-date? Correct? Does it make sense? Depending on the type of book the editor is working on—textbook, novel, biography, gardening manual, scientific survey—he will have to decide whether he has sufficient knowledge of the subject or whether the book should be vetted by an expert reader. Accuracy is important for fiction as well as nonfiction. Editors of gritty mysteries keep city maps on hand to be sure the detective can zip from one street to another without bogging down in one-way traffic.

Balance also requires concentration, again because imbalance is more likely to be caused by omission than by commission. In a recent collection of firsthand accounts of the Civil War, the anthologist selected memorable pieces that caught the editor up in their power. However, once the editor

separated himself from the emotional impact of the proposed selections, he saw that the book heavily favored Southern writers, that there was no mention of black troops, that there was scant attention paid to the home front. Thus the book did not truly portray the impact of the war on the United States, as it purported to; it was necessary to add new entries and delete some repetitious ones to achieve that.

Organization

Not only does the editor need to check for complete, accurate, and balanced information, he must also ensure that the information is presented in a way that can be followed.

As he reads through the manuscript, the editor must be certain that he can always follow the author's train of thought and that he has been told everything he needs to know to be where he is or do what he is doing. An editor tells of working on a gardening manual with detailed instructions for fertilizing and for killing weeds. The last sentence of the lengthy section read: "Be extremely careful in handling these chemicals, for they are poisonous; in fact, it is wise to wear gloves when fertilizing or weeding." As the editor pointed out, it might be a little late for the careless gardener by the time he or she found this out.

There are two helpful tools for reorganizing mixed-up manuscripts: the signpost sentence and the outline.

The editor should always be on the lookout for signpost sentences, sentences that clearly state or reveal the author's intent or direction. Frequently these sentences appear toward the end of sections, as summaries, rather than near the beginning, where they could function as topic sentences that shape the material that follows. When the editor comes across such a sentence, he should use it to the fullest advantage, moving it to where it orders a disorderly passage and guides the reader through the text. Here is an example:

Working together is hard. An assistant once remarked that until he worked at a publishing house, he had no idea of how badly authors were treated, almost as if they were pests that had to be tolerated if a house had to publish books. It is the editor's primary job, in the demanding process of publishing a book, to maintain a good working relationship.

This is a paragraph that, reworked, appears on page 161 in what I hope is much clearer form. Note that in the original draft, the main idea of the paragraph came at the end, leaving the reader to wonder about the meaning of the paragraph until he came to the end of it.

Another good way to get at poor organization is to strip away the words and go straight to the structure: Outline the material, whether it is an entire book whose chapters follow one another willy-nilly or a single muddled chapter. Occasionally I have had to go through a chapter paragraph by paragraph, noting the subject of each one in the margin; once that was done, I photocopied the original and cut the copy apart, clipping all the paragraphs on the same subject together and then reorganizing the paragraphs. This method is for extreme cases, however, and should not be necessary in the normal course of manuscript editing. A simple outline usually reveals repetition, omission, and poor organization and is an excellent base from which the author can rework the material.

Bad organization can sometimes be fixed with a bold stroke. An editor was working on a rather well-written history of the Vatican. The book opened with an excellent guided tour through the buildings, then it stalled in the second chapter, which was a chronology of popes. The editor fiddled and diddled, trying to make the chapter readable, to no avail. Whatever he did, the chapter remained a catalog, a barrier to the progress of the book. The information was clearly necessary to the book as reference material, but there was no need for it to interrupt the unfolding of Vatican history. The editor picked up the entire chapter and made it an appendix, where a list of factual biographies posed no problem.

Tone

Very few books, despite what their authors hope and believe, will interest everyone. The editor must help the author recognize the readers who will be most interested in the book and address them, whether they are the author's fellow professionals, readers coming to the subject for the first time, or highly knowledgeable amateurs.

Recently a psychiatrist who had usually addressed herself to a professional readership wrote a book for a general audience. Her editor pointed out several ways in which the text had to be reworked. First, the author was warned that general readers might not be familiar with all the terms and concepts that professionals would readily understand; this meant eliminating jargon and glossing necessary technical language. Second, the editor suggested grouping most of the research data and discussion of source material in appendixes at the back of the book where they could provide the scholarly foundation necessary for the book's arguments but not weigh them down; readers could consult the appendixes if they wanted to. Footnotes were used only for direct quotations. Third, the editor lightened the character of the book, making it more informal by eliminating summaries at the end of chapters and illustrating points with a few striking examples

rather than numerous case studies couched in psychiatric terminology.

Most authors do not have to shift gears so dramatically from book to book, but editors and authors should always be aware of the reader at the other side of the book and know his level of sophistication. This is brought home to me very clearly whenever I use a relatively straightforward recipe for brownies as a teaching exercise. Any student with some kitchen experience goes right through the recipe, but there are always a few kitchen-shy students who stumble over the opening instruction: "In a medium saucepan . . ."

Drawing the Work Out of the Author

Thus far we have covered what I would call the editor's first reading, or assessment, of the manuscript, which by and large takes place before the editor puts pencil to paper. This does not mean that editors read all manuscripts through twice. I do think, however, that editors read all manuscripts at two levels. The first reading is this assessment, in which the editor views the manuscript from some distance, scanning it for the large-scale issues of clarity and so on. The second reading is the working level, in which the editor gets down to the manuscript and frames the work he will draw out of the author.

In this demanding process it is the editor's job to maintain a good working relationship with the author. An editorial assistant once remarked that until he worked at a publishing house, he had no idea how badly authors were treated; it was almost as if they were mere pests who had to be tolerated if the house were to continue publishing books. But if the editor keeps the author informed, analyzes the editorial issues considerately, and queries the author with care, it is possible to avoid an adversarial situation in which the author or the editor or both see themselves as losers in a contest for the book. It is, after all, the goal of both to publish the best book possible, and with this in mind the editor works gently but firmly.

Information

A meeting just before you begin editing is one of the best ways to let the author know how the editing will proceed, especially if you have not already met. Obviously, a meeting is not always possible, and a letter or phone call may have to substitute, but the effort should be made.

The purpose of the meeting—and it can be lunch if you want a relaxed atmosphere—is to explain to the author what to expect from you as an editor and from your publishing house. You should explain the difference

between editing and copy editing and tell the author at what stage the manuscript will be sent back to her; how much editing you think the manuscript will need; whether any additions are necessary—bibliography, list of sources, glossary. You can also give the author some idea of schedule—how long each stage will take and how much time she will have to turn the material around. The author will get good basic working information, and you will have a chance to judge how the author will respond to editing, valuable knowledge when you are about to spend a good deal of time on the manuscript.

Even after laying out the basics, you should proceed with some caution. Unless you are absolutely confident that the author will agree to all your suggestions, it is wise to edit the first chapter, or perhaps two, and send it to the author, complete with a cover letter. Then put the manuscript aside and give the author two to three weeks to go over the edited chapter and send it back. When the author returns the manuscript, you will see immediately how much editing the author is open to. This will be your guide not only to further editing but also to ranking by order of importance.

Analysis

A few preliminaries about editorial marking are in order before the editor goes to work on the manuscript. Some of these notes sound like a kindergarten lesson, but the editor will be writing all over the manuscript and should keep in mind how this will look to the author. Messiness in these basics can get the editorial process off to a bad start.

In general the manuscript editor uses a black lead pencil, typically a No. 2, and queries in the margins. Stick-on flags are usually reserved for copy editors. Write clearly and firmly; many editors make tentative squiggles, so it is hard for the author to read their comments and queries. If you are editing, do it; do not underscore your doubts with lightly penciled jottings. Edit concisely, using the margin for your notes. The fewer marks you make, the easier it is for the author to follow your comments and, as a corollary, sympathize with and understand them. If a comment is too long for a marginal notation, save it for the cover letter.

If you want to try an exercise in editor-author relations, mail a marked-up manuscript, preferably one that has been edited in red pencil, to yourself to see how it would look to an author anticipating his first batch of manuscript from his publisher. "A bloody rag" was one editor's reaction.

Never paste over the author's original. If you must substantially revise a paragraph or two, type them on a separate sheet for the author's consideration.

Always retain a file copy of the manuscript. By contract the author is

required to submit two copies, so the second becomes the file copy. Sometimes someone in the house needs this; keep track of it or copy it. By the same token, most houses copy the edited manuscript before it goes to the author; not only does this offer insurance against loss, it also provides a copy for both editor and author should there be a phone consultation.

Preliminaries covered, we can move on to substantive editing. As should be clear by now, the issues that the editor addresses, his suggestions for changes and revision, are necessary for the success of the book; "sounds better" is rarely justification for an editorial change. Because the author has the final say on all changes that are not actual errors—facts, grammar, spelling—the editor must state the case for his suggestions convincingly. This requires analysis of the editorial issues as well as of the author's willingness to accept editing.

The editor has only so many points to play in any given manuscript, and he must decide which are the most important for every book he edits, establishing a hierarchy of changes that he believes the author must go along with. Roughly, I would group these changes as necessary, felicitous, and meticulous. It is not usually possible to work on all three fronts. In a manuscript that needs reorganization, new material, and substantial revision, it is a waste of time to fault the author for somewhat repetitious or awkward phrases; on the other hand, in a well-plotted novel that moves as smoothly as a canoe across a mountain lake, a poorly worded phrase will stick out like a discarded Styrofoam cup floating on the water.

The absolutely necessary changes are always of utmost importance and should not leave much room for discussion. These would include anything that is clearly wrong: omissions, weak organization and logic, factual errors, lack of balance, and the like. These problems weaken the core of the book and, if they are not addressed in the editing, open the book to criticism. In any manuscript with these problems, the editor must focus all his attention on them and may have to forgo some linguistic niceties.

Consider this excerpt from an obituary in the *New York Times* of October 27, 1989:

His wife, the former Susan J. Ault, died in 1983. They were married for 36 years.

He is survived by two daughters, Shirley Evans of Salem and Barbara Cleaveland of Alexandria, Va.; four grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.

From the dates given, the subject's older daughter could be no older than forty-two years old, assuming she was born in the first year of his marriage. For her and her sister, two women in their early forties at most, to have

three grandchildren is possible—triplets?—but not likely. This is the kind of statement that must be queried. Straightening this out is more important to the obituary than any other possible change.

The felicitous changes include substituting smooth phrasing for awkward language, heightening narrative thrust, and eliminating overlong citations that weigh down a popular work. Here the issues are less a matter of right and wrong than of improving the manuscript and presenting the reader with a better book. The editor will point out repetition, distracting plot details, sentences that plod along in a dull subject-predicate-object pattern, paragraphs of dense, thickly worded sentences, paragraphs of rapid-fire five-word sentences that leave the reader no time to absorb their meaning. Compare the unedited and edited versions of this passage:

Begin construction by laying out the bottom, Back, and Top on 1x4 stock. Then cut each piece.

Three holes are drilled in top to hold the baseballs. The centers of these holes are located 1 1/2" from front edge and 2 1/2" from each end and in the center of top. Mark these points and bore a 2" hole through them for the baseballs to sit in.

An electric drill and hole cutter will make quick work of making these large holes. If you use a brace and expandable bit, securely clamp parts to the table.

To Begin construction, by laying out the bottom, Back, and Top on 1x4 stock. Then cut each piece.

Next, three holes are drilled in top to hold the baseballs. ^{the piece for} ^{two outer}

The centers of these holes are located 1 1/2" from the front edge and 2 1/2" from each end, and in the center of the third hole is each of top. Mark these points and bore a 2" hole through them for the baseballs to sit in.

An electric drill and hole cutter will make quick work of making these large holes. If, however, you use a brace and expandable bit, securely clamp parts to the table.

You can use either an electric drill and hole cutter or a brace and expandable bit.

Note that there were no technical errors in the original manuscript, nothing that had to be edited. Every editor, however, brings his own judgment and reading to bear on the manuscripts he edits, and this editor believed that readers might have difficulty following these telescopic instructions, especially with the drilling equipment discussed *after* the drilling instructions. In rewording the passage, the editor has slowed down the pace; in addition, he has moved the information about equipment. How does the editor query these changes to the author? In a marginal note he says, "Instructions a bit brisk for reader to follow. OK to slow down? If not, please recast."

Note that the author's attention is drawn to the change and that she is given the chance to reject the suggestion and reword the passage herself. The editor must query all changes that touch on content—which means everything except grammar, punctuation, spelling, and house style, which by contract the publisher controls—for the content of the book is clearly the author's province. Frequently the query is a simple "OK?" for minor changes.

Fine points of language and phrasing and nuances of characterization are usually achieved only in manuscripts where there are few major revisions and changes. Here the editor can devote himself to making the language as

precise and meticulous as possible. Although the editorial suggestions here will probably be the most fastidious, the manuscript will probably be the least heavily edited because there are no major changes.

Querying

Almost all of the editor's work on the manuscript is presented to the author in the form of queries. He formulates these queries from the questions that arise as he reads through the manuscript, questions that usually suggest revisions, cuts, amplifications, and the like. In most cases, the author has the final say over which of these questions she will address, so it is in skillful and persuasive querying that the editor states his case and hopes to draw out of the author the work needed to publish the best book possible.

Querying takes many forms, including face-to-face discussions, but two of the most common are the cover letter and the marginal note, sometimes combined as a letter with an attached page of specific comments. The letter and note serve two different purposes: The letter discusses general or repeated issues, and the note cites specific instances or passages.

In the cover letter the editor can discuss questions too lengthy or complex to be handled in a marginal note or issues that crop up so frequently that the author may be annoyed if the editor calls her attention to them every time they occur. For example, the authors of a rockhounds' manual made several joking references, from their point of view, to inappropriate clothing worn by women on collecting expeditions ("Tell the little lady to leave her high heels home . . ."). Rather than query each potentially offensive passage in the manuscript, the editor used the cover letter:

I also think you might rework some passages that readers may find dated and possibly insulting; see checked passages on pages 12, 37, 62, 118, 214, 276–277, and 303.

Here is an excerpt from a masterful letter plus notes written by Saxe Commins, one of the formative editors at Random House, to S. N. Behrman, author of a biography of Max Beerbohm.

Now, less than twenty-four hours after the arrival of the typescript, I must tell you that you are getting closer and closer in mood and selective detail to the impressionist portrait of Max both of us have in mind. Your own charm and unmistakable style are strikingly apparent on every one of the tentative forty-six pages, and the material is indeed rich if, until now, only suggested.

I still feel very strongly that it cries for expansion. . . .

It's no favor to you to make so generalized a statement. Unless I can particularize you won't be able to guess what I am driving at. So let me offer for whatever they are worth, page-by-page questions and suggestions, some sensible, some captious, to be accepted or vetoed, but at least a sort of agenda for our summit talks. To begin:

Page 1. It seems to me that much more can be made of Max's and Herbert's background by elaborating on Julius, Constantia, and Eliza, more or less as you did with the forebears of Duveen. . . .

Page 2. Would it be possible to convey a little of the prevailing atmosphere in America, particularly in Chicago, when Tree put on *An Enemy of the People*. . . .

Page 4. Would it be out of place to write in a sentence or two about *The Yellow Book*. It had quite a history. On this page you do give a little of the flavor of the essay, but I think it would profit by a few more comments almost in Max's own vein.

Page 5. The references to Scott Fitzgerald and Ned Sheldon are dangling in midair. Unless you specify some of the similarities I'm afraid the comparison will be lost. And why not more about Aubrey Beardsley?

Page 6–7. The cracks at Pater are too good to miss. They make me want more. The gem-like flame should be blown on a little harder.*

Commins's skill in querying could enhance any editor-author relationship. Most important, he begins by reaffirming his own enthusiasm for the book, a vital factor in encouraging the author and thus in drawing the most from him. It is clear at every point that the editor and author are working for the same goal even if it may take a great deal of time and effort to reach it. The overall tone is one of help and interest. General criticism, which calls for expansion, quickly gives way to specific problems—omissions, repetitions, insufficient information—so the author knows exactly what he has to work on.

Note also how Commins takes advantage of his response as first reader and by extension suggests the response of other readers. Many of his page-by-page comments refer to himself or a reader. This approach not only envisions the manuscript as a finished book or article in the hands of its ultimate audience but also points out manuscript difficulties in a meaningful way. Rather than say to the author, "No one will be able to follow

*Dorothy Commins, *What Is an Editor? Saxe Commins at Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) pp. 90–91.

argument here," the editor can make the same point by saying, "Am having some trouble following argument here; please give example." The difference is subtle, but by taking some of the burden onto himself, the editor is less condemning and illustrates the reader's need.

Note the detail of Commins's comments. A less attentive and considerate editor might dash off marginal exclamations like "vague," "need more," "anticlimactic"; instead Commins gives the author the reasons and arguments for all his suggestions. This leaves the author very little room to ignore or disagree with them, helping Commins get what he wants. I have seen editors scribble "right?" in the margin next to a questionable passage, with no explanation for the query. This seldom yields the response the editor wants. What if the author answers "yes" and gives no further evidence or authority? Worse yet, what if the author, bothered by the question, answers "no"?

Effective querying elicits the response the editor wants, and he must direct the author to it. After all, if the author has been vague or confused in his first draft, there is no reason to believe that, undirected, he will improve substantially the second time around. Thus the query must be carefully worded. Take, for example, this garbled paragraph:

In the nineteenth century, tuna was strictly chicken feed. This was not true of salmon, which was canned and widely available. One year the sardine catch fell short, and a sardine canner hit on the idea of putting up tuna. Canned tuna caught on immediately.

If the editor queries marginally "confusing; please clarify," how can he guarantee a less confusing rewording? But what if the editor says, "Hard to follow. Do you mean salmon and sardines were both commonly canned and a sardine canner, lacking sardines and salmon, used tuna? Please add explanatory sentence"? Here the editor has laid the groundwork for the author, and if the author answers the query, the editor will probably get enough information to make the passage comprehensible or, at the least, editable.

. . .

And so, in the end, we return to the author-editor exchange, that long and rewarding process that results in the best book possible. How much work that takes from the editor depends on what kind of manuscript he has received from the author, but the more effective the editor, the less his work will show, no matter how much he has put into the process.

Editors are not authors, nor do they wish to be. What the best of editors wishes to be is the perceptive, demanding, energetic, and patient prober who can devote his particular talents and skills to the enterprise of working with authors to publish good books.

Line Editing

The Art of the Reasonable Suggestion

John K. Paine

JOHN PAINE is the senior manuscript editor for the NAL/Dutton wing of Penguin USA.

Ms. Waxman's goal in line editing is "drawing out the best book possible." John Paine describes some of the most effective techniques and principles he uses as a working manuscript editor to achieve that high purpose in his short but sagacious essay.

Believing line editing to be "the art of the reasonable suggestion," Mr. Paine deems it essential that an editor learn yet another art to make the first one work with maximum effectiveness: "the art of communication." He points out "two features in any editorial note that are paramount in building editor-author rapport. One is that an editor state, continually, what she likes about a work. . . . Second, the language employed should be that of a helpmeet."

Mr. Paine details ways in which a helpful manuscript editor can stimulate "a creative response" in an author. "This is what an editor truly wants, that an author consider a point and fashion her own original response. This is what leads to a better book."