



Freelance editors: Should I Hire One?

by Julie H. Ferguson

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Aspiring authors ask this question almost as often as they ask, "Should I get an agent?" Well, freelance editors charge a lot to edit a book-length manuscript - about \$2500.00+ - and it can take work to find the right one for you. But, once found, good ones are treasures indeed, not to be given up lightly.

If you can afford it, **why would you want to hire a freelance editor?** Perhaps you are unsure of your grammar and want the ms to be as near perfect as possible. Maybe you need an expert to look at your plot, flow, and characterization. Or you may know that something is not quite right but you cannot put your finger on it. My advice is to pinpoint exactly why you want your work scrutinized by an editor, then go looking, because editors do different things and have various specialties. Some prefer technical mss, some edit only fiction, and still others work on text books or special subjects.

Where do you find freelance editors? The best place to start, and perhaps all you need, is the Editors' Association of Canada's (EAC) website at www.editors.ca. This gives advice on hiring an editor, an on-line directory, contact numbers and addresses for their regional branches, etc. The really good news is that non-members can attend their inexpensive local workshops led by experts for writers.

How do you know if an editor can do the job you need? First you need to understand that there is no regulatory body in Canada governing editors – anyone can hang out a shingle. However, EAC does list the editorial standards that they expect of their members on their website. Many editors do not have a degree in English and writers should understand that this is not necessarily a hindrance. Once you have found a fit with the expertise and preferred areas of 3 or 4, at the very least interview them and ask for references, see some of their work at the before and after stages, and request that they edit 2-3 sample pages of your manuscript. You need to establish, not only their skill level, but also a relationship. Taking criticism from someone you dislike does not come easily to anyone. Pick an editor to whom you can relate comfortably.

How do editors charge? This varies and can be hourly, by the page, or a fixed price/project. Rush jobs are 10-20% more. Don't forget to find out your chosen editor's fee schedule ahead of time.

What steps can you take if you cannot afford editors' fees? Take some self-editing courses through Continuing Ed departments of school districts or colleges, sign-up for EAC's local workshops, and/or join a local writers' group.

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