

A FEW QUESTIONS ABOUT HIRING AN EDITOR

What should I look for in an editor?

Lawyers go to law school, and doctors go to medical school – but there is no editing school. Editors come to the profession from a variety of different backgrounds. One way to choose an editor is to look for a combination of **qualifications**, **experience**, and **professional involvement**.



- **Qualifications:** look for significant training in a related discipline. A BA in English is a good start, but it shouldn't be the end.
- **Experience:** find out what kinds of documents an editor has worked on. Are any of them comparable to yours? If your document requires specialized knowledge of a field, make sure the candidate has that knowledge. If your project is substantial (for example, a book), does the candidate have experience handling documents of that size?
- **Professional involvement:** editors tend to work in isolation, so it's important to see some evidence that they are connected to their colleagues, aware of what others are doing in the field, and in tune with current industry practices. What organizations does your potential editor belong to? You can search the Editors' Association of Canada's Online Directory of editors here: <http://www.editors.ca/ode/search>.

How do I know what it will cost to have a document edited?

You can send me an email on the Contact page and I'll be in touch to find out more about it. I'll need to know how long the document runs and what kind of writing it is. I'll probably ask you to email me a sample of a few pages, so I can have a clearer sense of what's involved.

Here is some information from the Editors' Association of Canada about rates: <http://www.editors.ca/content/what-do-editors-charge>.

And here are some sample rates posted by the Editorial Freelancers Association:
<http://www.the-efa.org/res/rates.php>.

It's going to be more expensive than I'd expected. Is there a way to bring down the cost?

It never hurts to ask if there are alternative ways of dealing with a substantial up-front cost. Perhaps the payments can be made in installments. It may be possible to have only an initial portion of the document edited, and to ask the editor for a list of recurring areas of concern, so that one of the authors or a member of the administrative staff could continue the work with the rest of the document. That might be all that is necessary, or maybe the process will reduce the editing time and therefore the cost of having a professional edit later on.

Also, if you feel cardiac arrest looming when you see an estimate, remember that it is just that: an estimate, an educated guess. It can be very difficult to determine how long a piece of work is going to take. Sometimes an estimate isn't necessary: if you don't need a contract, working on a week-to-week basis means that you receive completed work regularly. This allows you to assess the quality and decide whether you feel you're getting good value for money. If not, you can discuss any problems with the editor. If these are not resolved, you aren't contractually obliged to continue the relationship. If you're happy with the work, you can continue as long as your budget allows.

What sorts of questions should I ask?

By all means ask about any of the issues raised above. Also, depending on what kind of work you need done, you might want to inquire as to the candidate's related skills. Some editors are prepared to do a certain amount of, for example, formatting, layout, or graphic design; others are not. Some prefer proofreading to copy editing, or structural to stylistic editing: what are the candidate's strengths and are they a good match for your piece of work?

Above all...

Communicate with your editor. Feel free to say: "I find it more helpful when you do X than when you do Y." If you aren't convinced a change should be made, request an explanation. Ask questions.

Producing the best possible document is a collaborative effort. The more you tell your editor about what you want, the better equipped she or he will be to provide it. Good communication helps create a product that will make everyone happy.