



Author-Editor Relationship Quiz

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The *AMA Manual of Style* states, “After acceptance for publication, a manuscript undergoes copyediting, now often referred to as *manuscript editing*....The manuscript editor sends the edited manuscript, including online-only content, with proposed additions and deletions clearly indicated, as well as queries, along with a cover letter and the edited art and tables, to the reviewing editor and the author for approval. After the author responds, the manuscript editor incorporates the author’s changes” (§6.2.1, Manuscript Editing, p 309 in print). Sounds easy enough, but the truth is the relationship between authors and editors can vary from harmonious to neutral to adversarial.

This month’s quiz branches out from the traditional format of identifying and correcting errors based on your knowledge of the *AMA Manual of Style*. This quiz provides historical snippets of famous author-editor relationships as a jumping-off point for exploring ways for editors to effectively work with authors.

Vladimir Nabokov, author of Lolita, notoriously and wittily disdained editors. In a 1967 interview in The Paris Review, he said, “By ‘editor’ I suppose you mean proofreader. Among these I have known limpid creatures of limitless tact and tenderness who would discuss with me a semicolon as if it were a point of honor—which, indeed, a point of art often is. But I have also come across a few pompous avuncular brutes who would attempt to ‘make suggestions’ which I countered with a thunderous ‘stet!’”¹

1. What is the best way for editors to communicate with authors who balk at the suggestions made to improve the manuscript?

- a. E-mail the author to tell him/her that all the edits are based on the *AMA Manual of Style* and therefore not subject to change.
- b. Telephone the author to discuss the edits, iterating the rationale and providing resource support for the changes.
- c. Do not respond to the author.
- d. Eliminate all the edits and publish the paper as the author originally submitted it.

The relationship between Emily Dickinson, poet, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson, clergyman, activist, and man of letters, began when she wrote to him asking him to read her poems. The New Yorker writes, “Dickinson’s letter concluded with a request not to ‘betray’ her. Higginson never did, but many scholars ... consider that, through an excess of caution and a deficit of imagination, he betrayed her art.”²

2. What is the best way for editors to ensure that they are “on the same page” as the authors of the manuscripts they are editing?

- a. Explain to the author the types of tasks that will be performed on the manuscript (eg, a straightforward copyedit or a more substantive content edit).
- b. Share with the author some samples of previous edited manuscripts.
- c. Explain to the author that the editor is required to follow particular style guides and provide the author with a list of those resources.
- d. Invite the author out to lunch to chat about the work.



Sometimes the line between author and editor becomes blurred. Take the relationship between Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot. Pound edited Eliot's *The Waste Land*, cutting the poem from more than 1000 lines to 434, limiting the poem's message, and eliminating Eliot's sarcastic tone. Eliot acquiesced to almost all of Pound's revisions and suggestions, leading some scholars to suggest that Pound should have received credit as coauthor rather than editor of *The Waste Land*.³

3. What should editors do when they think a manuscript requires rewriting rather than editing?

- a. Try to edit the manuscript anyway.
- b. Have a colleague edit the manuscript.
- c. Work closely with the author and/or editor to determine what level of editing should be performed.
- d. Partially edit the manuscript, ignoring the sections that are out of your comfort zone.

Even editors who have a history of working successfully with authors can stumble into a difficult author-editor relationship. Maxwell Perkins, the famed Scribner's editor, helped cement the careers of Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings. However, his relationship with Thomas Wolfe proved challenging. Wolfe and Perkins worked closely together, but Wolfe eventually bristled at the theory that he owed his success to Perkins. He left Scribner's in November 1936, writing to Perkins, "the editorial relation between us, which began, it seems to me, so hopefully, and for me so wonderfully, has now lost its initial substance. It has become a myth—and what is worse than that, an untrue myth—and it seems to me that both of us are victims of that myth. You know the terms of the myth well enough—it was venomously recorded by a man named De Voto in the *Saturday Review of Literature* during this past summer—and the terms of the myth are these: that I cannot write my books without your assistance, that there exists at Scribners an 'assembly line' that must fit the great dismembered portions of my manuscript together into a semblance of unity, that I am unable to perform the functions of an artist for myself."⁴

4. Sometimes editors edit so extensively that questions of authorship arise. An editor should receive credit as an author if he/she performs which of the following duties?

- a. conception and design, or acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of the data
- b. drafting the manuscript or revising it critically for important intellectual content
- c. approval of the version of the manuscript to be published
- d. all of the above

There are, however, some well-known successful author-editor relationships. Ursula Nordstrom edited children's books for Harper & Row and had satisfying relationships with the authors Maurice Sendak, E. B. White, Margaret Wise Brown, and Shel Silverstein, among many others.

5. Which of the following makes for a successful author-editor relationship?

- a. flexibility
- b. tact
- c. respect
- d. all of the above

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