

Why You Need a Professional Editor BEFORE You Try to Sell Your Novel

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Before you risk your efforts and money on publishing your book, you owe it to yourself to have it professionally edited. It can make the difference between trying to sell a rough cut rock that YOU think is a diamond versus trying to sell a cut, polished, gorgeous gem.

You pour your heart and soul into writing this novel. You believe in it. But why can't you get an agent or publisher to help you? And if you chose self-publishing, why can't you sell more copies? You know you enjoyed writing it. Why aren't more people interested in reading and enjoying it? You've read that the odds are long and that persistence is the key to your writing success.

But darn it, why aren't more people interested in it?

The reason why could be staring you in the face. Maybe, just maybe, your novel needs some professional help.

Those who self-publish desperately seek a solution and may think it lies in paying for a publicist or marketing. But the main reason it fails to sell to an agent, publisher, or buyers may be that the story is weak or poorly told.

Hundreds of thousands of people are writing novels these days. You spend months, maybe years, writing the novel. To help you finish, you cling to the daydream of becoming a well known and highly successful author. In your mind, you see your book in the major bookstores. You picture yourself signing autograph copies for smiling buyers.

You hold on to your dream while you finish your story. You write a query letter and synopsis and send off dozens of letters.

Then reality sets in. Nobody seems to want it. You even give copies to some friends and ask them to read it. But they tell you the next day it was "interesting" but not the kind of book they like. Do you give talks and book signings, but end up taking most of your books home? Again?

This is not turning out to be like your dream, is it?

Instead of trying harder to sell the same manuscript, get a professional editor to look at it. Learn why you are having so much trouble selling it. You may need two types of editing.

1. Copy editing

Copy editing marks or fixes spelling, grammar, punctuation, excessive use of adverbs and adjectives, weak or wrong word choice, typos, etc. In other words, the "English" of your writing.

For this, you can use someone who has a keen eye for English, such as a college graduate in English or literature, a journalist, or an editor of a magazine, newspaper, publishing company, etc. It is better if you can use someone with experience in copy editing and who understands the rules of English writing that the publishing industry follows. Your brother-in-law may not be good enough.

2. Content (or “developmental”) editing

This type of editing focuses on the story and how you wrote it. This is what you may need the most.

Content editing will point out such things as:

- a slow start of your story
- a lack of tension and conflict
- too much or too little description of the settings of scenes
- weak characterization of the main characters
- telling of emotions and descriptions instead of showing
- lack of sufficient emotion
- point of view errors ("head hopping")
- excessive number of characters
- credibility of your dialogue
- whether you've used a strong author's voice or not
- Is your protagonist compelling?
- Is your antagonist credible and strong enough for tension?
- and much more.

In addition—and the most important—is feedback on your plot.

- Is it compelling?
- Does it grab and hold readers?
- Do you have too many subplots?
- Do the stakes increase and culminate in a tense crisis and resolution that satisfies the reader?
- Or is the ending too predictable?

- Do some chapters and scenes slow the story down too much?
- Is your protagonist compelling?
- Is your antagonist credible, strong enough, and likely to beat your protagonist so the reader experiences tension until the end?
- Is your story a page-turner or a put-downer?

Have you written a story that best allows your reader to enjoy escaping his/her own world? That's the main reason why people buy novels, isn't it? It may have been exciting to you to write it, but is it exciting to read? You may have described the movie in your head, but did you write it so your reader can see the same movie? And get excited about it?

A good professional editor can help you see the weaknesses in your story and its writing and can help you improve on them. Sometimes it is even better to learn that your first novel cannot be rescued and you'd be better off working on another one.

Why beat yourself up with your lack of success? Learn what you did wrong or weak and how to do a better job. Hire a good professional editor.

"You write to communicate to the hearts and minds of others what's burning inside you. And we edit to let the fire show through the smoke." -
Arthur Polotnik

Victory Crayne is an independent professional fiction editor and writing coach/mentor. Visit her website at www.crayne.com for the answers to many of your questions. Then email her at victory@crayne.com.