



UNIT-04

Editing Fundamentals

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Discuss the main objectives of editing and explain the main tasks involved in editing a report prior to publishing
- ✓ Understand the eight main principles for good news editing and who takes responsibility for editing journalistic texts
- ✓ Explain the importance of good sentence structure and understand how minor details can make a big difference to how a text is interpreted

Unit 4

Editing Fundamentals

'Never overestimate the public's knowledge and never underestimate the public's intelligence,' - the ideal principle that governs editing.

Editing is essential in a news organisation. A news story is rough-edged like a raw diamond, written by hurried reporters. As a result, a team of editors polishes and refines the copy. As a result, editing is done to achieve a balance of news coming from within the organisation and news coming in from the outside. Sorting and sifting also aids in the establishment of parity between well-written articles and those written by inexperienced reporters. Unwanted material is weeded out in the process. Finally, only the most important stories are chosen. These are checked and double-checked for grammar, syntax, facts, figures, and sense, as well as clarified and condensed for space efficiency.

Editing's Goals:

Striving for focus and accuracy: One of the most important aspects of the editing stage is accuracy. The checking of facts, which includes the correct spelling and pronunciation of names, the factual details of a story, and any basis upon which conclusions are drawn, is a professional and ethical responsibility that news reports must include in their research and writing process. The standard approach is to check for accuracy multiple times. All conscientious, responsible writers should follow suit. The finished text's dependability is determined by the accuracy of the research and writing processes.

Fact-checking: The internet has made it easier to find sources for fact-checking. Regrettably, the internet has increased access to questionable sources. Debates about the academic credibility and trustworthiness of public-access sources are likely to continue as internet access expands, changing the rules by which sources are evaluated. As the proliferation of medical, legal, and other specialty web sites attests, easy access, speed, and the appearance of authenticity all influence public use and acceptance of available resources. Surgical procedures can even be viewed online. Who's to say what's genuine and what's not? The majority of internet users are aware of the dangers of entering credit card information on unknown and untrusted websites. The cautionary phrase "buyer beware" applies equally to those who use the internet to gather facts in an indiscriminate manner.

Maintaining objectivity: Even well-intentioned sources can offer inaccurate information. For example, a distraught mother who claims that her incarcerated son is an innocent victim of federal law may have reached that incorrect conclusion due to her own emotional investment in her son's case, rather than the facts of the case. To maintain objectivity, the mother's perspective can be reported as her factual, though undocumented, point of view, along with the contents of the actual arrest warrant or any other claims communicated by the arresting authority.

Staying on Track: Another important aspect of the editing stage is maintaining the focus of a piece of writing. Writers have a reputation for being fiercely protective of their work. Writing a text can be a tedious and time-consuming task. Some writers find it difficult to recognise and delete tangential sentences or passages after investing so much time and effort, especially if they are well-crafted or

contain brilliant ideas. Generalizations that do not adequately cover the specifics of a topic can also blind writers. Taking on the role of editor, in other words, frequently clashes with the writer's emotional and intellectual investment in the writing process. As a result, many writers take a step back from the text before editing it, or ask someone else to read it objectively.

Editing Principles

The following are the main principles for good news editing:

- Accuracy
- Attribution
- Fairness and balance
- Brevity
- Clarity
- Readability
- Human interest
- Astute observation

Accuracy:

The sub editor should be obsessed with accuracy because a single mistake can ruin a newspaper's or magazine's reputation in a fraction of a second. The importance of double-checking and cross-checking names, figures, and facts cannot be overstated. Attribution:

Attribution:

Always credit the source of the information so that readers can assess its credibility. "A high-ranking defence official, according to Finance Ministry sources." Etc. are attributions that assist readers in reaching their own conclusions while avoiding the suspicion that the reporter is telling his own version of the story.

Fairness and Balance:

The foundation of good editing is balance and fairness. Fairness means not taking sides, while balance means giving both sides of the story. It also means that the newspaper's columns should not be used to support political parties, institutions, communities, or individuals. It is the quality of a professional reporter, and it is the responsibility of a sub editor to put it into practise.

Brevity:

In journalism, brevity is a virtue that both readers and editors value. It is telling a story in a straightforward manner, as it should be. It saves time and space, and when executed flawlessly, it garners praise.

Clarity:

The ability to think clearly and express it on paper is a quality that can propel one to the top of the media hierarchy. The length of sentences and the straightforwardness with which they are expressed

have an impact on readability.

Readability:

A sentence's average length should not exceed 18 words, which is standard. Reading a sentence with more than 18 words is difficult. Although some accomplished authors have far exceeded the standard and yet remained readable due to their craftsmanship, sentences longer than 25 words would be difficult to read. Beginners, on the other hand, should avoid long, winding, and complicated sentence structures. Writing news stories with simple words, short sentences, and simple sentences is the best way to go.

Human Interest:

The art of editing is all about using a style that piques people's interest. Sub editors should see events through the eyes of the readers, and news stories should be written with the reader's hopes, fears, and aspirations in mind. The subeditor should identify with the fictitious "common man," who does not exist but represents the silent majority that the journalist is obligated to defend and protect.

The Editing Process

The primary goal of editing is to tell the story in as few words as possible. Because there is more material than can be used, condensing is required. The second factor to consider is clarity, which can be achieved by avoiding complex sentence structures and using common words. The third factor to consider is assertiveness. The sub-editor must always look for the most effective way to convey the story's ideas. The fourth factor to consider is accuracy. It entails keeping an eye out for minor factual inaccuracies that mar an otherwise compelling story.

Editing entails more than ensuring that words are spelled correctly, that proper language is used, that punctuation is used correctly, and that spelling is accurate. These are, however, crucial details that distinguish a well-crafted publication from one that is sloppy. Editors, as gatekeepers of a publication, must have a clear understanding of the mission. As a result, part of editing entails being missionaries and part entails being ambassadors for ideas. The best ideas, in my experience, tend to come from the bottom up rather than the top down. As a result, editors should encourage writers to develop their own story ideas. Prompting, nudging, cajoling, pushing—whatever works—is used to accomplish this.

Listening skills are required for editing. First, the writer should be heard, followed by the editor's response. Because two heads are better than one, the conversation process enriches stories. Conversation should occur when the idea is first conceived; it should occur during and after the reporting phase; it should occur before the story is written; and it should occur after the editor has completed the story's processing. At each stage, the editor should keep in mind that the story is both the reporter's and the reader's. The story isn't the editor's. Like loaves of bread, story ideas are plentiful. All of the ingredients must be combined and kneaded carefully for the final product to be good. The dough is then placed in the oven to rise until it is ready to eat. In a story, punctuation plays an important role. Its purpose is to assist the reader in understanding the wording by guiding them through the sentence or paragraph.

Revision

If the writer is going to see the changes, they should be made clearly in pencil on the typescript, which is normally done in ink for the printer. The author can then receive a reasonably legible photocopy for review and revision. With a marginal note, the editor can draw attention to any points that are questionable.

Reorganizing the Structure

The writer should be responsible for reorganising a whole article, argument, or section, but the editor should have good reasons for requesting major reorganisation and should suggest how it should be done.

Expansion

Only the writer can provide missing material if a step in the argument is missing, or if more experimental evidence is required.

Shortening

Shortening an article to a specific length can be done by the author, but it is usually done better in the editorial office. If the writer is asked to complete the task, the editor must specify how it should be completed, including which sections, paragraphs, tables, or illustrations could be removed, which sections could be condensed, and which marginally relevant themes could be eliminated.

The Title

A good title conveys the main subject or message in as few words as possible. Because editors are more knowledgeable about the use of titles in information retrieval than most writers, they should have a say in re-titling stories as needed.

Spelling

The difference between American and British spelling causes issues in today's international journals, which are mostly written in English. If the editor, publisher, or printer refuses to accept inconsistency between articles, the editor or copy-editor should correct the spelling to the most common version in the country of publication.

Rewriting and Revising Guidelines, with some Basic Editing Principles:

1. In the first paragraph, state the main points of the news.
2. Use a verb in the headline to add vigour to the story.
3. Wherever there is a sliver of doubt, double-check names, titles, facts, figures, dates, and addresses. The sub-editor has access to a reference book that will answer any questions.
4. In a dispute, both sides of the story must be heard.
5. Make use of short sentences and paragraphs.
6. In court cases, refer to people by their full names rather than using terms like accused, witness, or defendant.

7. Use the word 'correct' within brackets to indicate that a spelling is correct.
8. Be wary of names from other countries.
8. Long, unfamiliar words, especially scientific and medical terms, should be defined.
9. Avoid using words like 'despite' or 'because' to start sentences.
10. Don't use ambiguous terms like "serious charge" or "certain offence."
11. Reporters frequently use the word 'meanwhile' to create an artificial flow to a story. Remove it.
12. Use concrete language, such as words that cause the reader to see, hear, smell, or taste something. Look for concrete images and visual word pictures in the story.
13. Pronouns should be used with caution. The most common grammatical errors in news stories are the misuse of the relative pronoun and punctuation.
14. Unless it's a feature or news analysis, any trace of personal opinion or a value judgement should be removed from the copy.

Language and Style Editing

It is not the job of a sub-editor to change a writer's style. They do, however, have a responsibility to ensure that the copy is correct in terms of spelling, grammar, and punctuation. The majority of copy can be tightened. Even if only a few words are removed from a paragraph, the overall space savings will be significant. Some stories, particularly those from news organisations, can be sharply trimmed, but the sub-editor should not go overboard. Imprudent butchering of local copy is a surefire way to lower reporter morale. It's just as important to have a good ear for language as it is to have a good eye for grammar. The sub-editor can find unclear or nonsensical expressions by carefully reading the copy and using the blue pencil.

The proliferation of jargon, which has virtually made it impossible for the average reader to follow many of today's important and significant stories, is the greatest threat to the news columns of today's newspapers. Jargon is defined as the use of circumlocution rather than short, direct speech, as well as the use of ambiguous, abstract nouns rather than concrete nouns. Jargon is specialised terminology for a particular activity, profession, or group. It develops as a kind of shorthand, similar to slang, to quickly express ideas that are frequently discussed among group members.

Newspaper readers develop the habit of reading between the lines, reading a story completely or partially, or misinterpreting its meaning. This occurs in the majority of cases because the story is disorganised, poorly written, and devoid of facts. Characters must be identified in every story, the source of the news must be stated, and statements must frequently be qualified early in the story and accurately. Journalists have developed a unique style and language known as 'journalese.' It is not always elegant or grammatically correct, and it frequently fails to communicate with readers.

Journalese is the result of the non-literary mind's efforts to find alternatives to the obvious where none are required, and it's best avoided by accepting even a tired phrase when it expresses what you want to say. The modern editing practise is to avoid using too much punctuation in copy.

Punctuation serves only one purpose: to make reading easier by indicating where the pauses would be if the story were read aloud. A good practise for the sub-editor is to use full stops liberally in short sentences, which improves readability. Punctuation isn't necessary in well-constructed sentences. However, wherever punctuation is required, it should be used with caution because even a misplaced or

omitted comma can change the meaning of a sentence. Punctuation marks improve readability and clarity. Simultaneously, too much will clog up the sentence. Another editing stumbling block is the use of the word 'that.' Where it is very important and failure to use it is ungrammatical, editors frequently omit this word. However, in sentences like "he said (that) he was going to work when the accident occurred," it can be omitted. There can only be one rule for the editor: let it depend on how the sentence sounds.

When reporting on interviews or speeches in newspapers, the words 'former' and 'latter' are frequently used. They should not try to find a place in a newspaper, according to professional advice. They irritate the reader by making them move their eyes up and down to identify the people mentioned in these words.

Figures can be perplexing. They must be spelled out from one to nine and given in numbers from ten to ninety. When two numbers are next to each other, such as '18 34-seated buses,' one of the numbers should be spelled out. If at all possible, avoid using this structure. Except for historical or commonly used phrases, month dates are written in figures. For example, July 16th (denoting a historic event) rather than July 16th.

In order to improve the story's quality and appeal, editing should pay close attention to the words in the story. Technical terms should be explained in plain English so that readers can understand them honestly. The use of familiar words over unfamiliar words should be prioritised. Editing should simplify the story and bring the language back to life where it has been dormant. While doing so, it is important to remember important details and ensure accuracy.

When using foreign expressions, the editor must ensure that they are correctly spelled, used, and understood. Words are the fundamental building blocks of journalism. The editor should value the words and pay attention to how they are organised and strung together. Any misplacement of words has the potential to change the meaning. As a result, punctuation marks, grammar, and syntax are given special attention. All of these are crucial in the construction of a sentence.

Keep Sentences Short, Sharp, and Clear

Whether you're writing for newspapers, radio, or the Internet, you should always aim for words and sentences that convey the most information with the least amount of ambiguity. This usually entails keeping sentences and words short and simple. You can use long words if you want to, but make sure they're doing their job.

Sentence Length

In news writing, there is no one-size-fits-all rule for sentence length, but you should set a goal for the number of words you use. Except in exceptional circumstances, we recommend that you never use more than 20 words in a single sentence. Your sentences will be simpler, there will be less room for error, and you will use words more efficiently if you follow this rule.

Story A

A twin-engined Beechcraft Baron aircraft hit an electric power line and crashed near Cardiff airport this week, killing four passengers, the pilot, and three people in a car.

Story B

An aircraft crashed near Cardiff airport this week, killing eight people. When their twin-engined Beechcraft Baron collided with a power line, the pilot and four passengers died. Three more people were killed when the plane collided with a car on a road near the airport.

Despite the fact that Story B has more words than Story A, it is divided into three sentences. In Story B, none of the sentences are longer than 20 words. If you have someone read both stories aloud to you, you will quickly notice that Story B is easier to comprehend.

The reason is straightforward.

Story A is made up of six separate ideas that the reader or listener must comprehend at the same time:

1. the passengers on the plane;
2. the passengers in the vehicle;
3. the plane's type;
4. the reason for the accident;
5. the accident's location;
6. the moment when the plane crashed

In comparison, each sentence in Story B contains fewer ideas.

There are only three simple ideas in the first sentence:

1. the total number of people who have died;
2. where it hit the ground;
3. when it crashed

The second sentence reads as follows:

1. how many people perished in the plane;
2. the plane's exact make and model;
3. the precise cause of the accident

The third sentence informs us that:

1. how the people in the car died;
2. where the car was;
3. how many died in the car.

You could argue that Story B, in addition to being longer, contains more concepts to comprehend. Many of those ideas, however, are not distinct. They are connected to the details in the previous sentence. Understanding is often aided by connecting ideas and repeating details. What's more, those ten ideas aren't thrown at our audience all at once. The full stop at the end of each sentence (which is represented by a pause on radio and television) gives the reader or listener time to process one set of facts before moving on to the next.

We recommend that each sentence contain no more than three distinct ideas. You can use four ideas per sentence on occasion, as long as they are not complicated. Because two of the ideas - the time and place - are very simple and easy for the reader to understand, we fit four into the intro of Story B above.

Lively Language

The words you use will aid in the comprehension of your story. Long words aren't bad in and of themselves if they're the only ones that can accurately explain a specific meaning. However, because the English language is so large and diverse, there are usually shorter alternatives that work just as well.

Many young journalists believe that even the simplest news story requires them to use their entire vocabulary. You may want to brag about your language skills, but keep in mind that knowledge isn't everything. The reader's or listener's vocabulary is more important.

Some journalists also believe that adding words is the only way to add drama or depth to a story. We hear things like:

The man dashed *quickly* across the street to assist the *helpless* boy who was being beaten *mercilessly*.

Remove the italicised adjectives and adverbs. They are superfluous and only serve to slow down the sentence. Because people do not usually run slowly, the word quickly is unnecessary. The boy is clearly helpless, as he would not be beaten if he were not. Furthermore, the word mercilessly is superfluous because most beatings are merciless.

The sentence has now become much more lively and sharp:

The man dashed across the street to assist the boy who was being beaten.

Using New Words

Many sloppy writers use new words without considering how they will be understood by the general public. To make sentences shorter, they sometimes change nouns to verbs. The danger is that the resulting verb is often less precise than the original phrase and is more difficult for people to understand.

Avoid using verbs such as:

- To author (use to write)
- To hospitalise (use to admit to hospital or to be in hospital)
- To parent (use to be a parent or to act like a parent).

You must be extremely cautious when introducing new words that your readers or listeners may not be familiar with. This is especially true if the word is spoken in a foreign language. Stick to words you're already familiar with.

Sentence Structure

Writing short sentences with simple words isn't enough. You must also construct your sentences in such a way that the concepts are clear. You can accomplish this by employing the active voice. You'll recall

that the phrase "the man hit the table" is written in the active voice (where the man is the hitter). The passive voice is used in the sentence "the table was hit by the man" Write in the active voice whenever possible. That is how the majority of people communicate. People do not say "the bus was missed by me" but rather "I missed the bus"

However, there are times when using the passive voice is unavoidable. This is especially true when it's unclear who's to blame for the action or when the sentence's subject is unimportant or unclear. For instance, we might write:

Food poisoning has been suspected in three children who have been admitted to hospital. (In the passive voice)

It would be incorrect to use either of the following versions, the first because we don't know who admitted them (was it a doctor or a nurse?), and the second because we don't know if it was food poisoning:

Someone took three children to hospital with suspected food poisoning.

OR

Three children are in hospital due to food poisoning.

Objectivity

Not only must your language be simple to understand, but it must also be fair. You should avoid using words that portray a person, an event, or a situation in a biased light.

Because of how they are commonly used in a community, many words acquire unique, skewed meanings. In some cases, such words are unavoidable. Make sure that the words you use reflect the community's meaning rather than your own. You should be especially cautious when using words that describe disagreements or conflicts. In these situations, each side to the dispute may choose words that reflect well on them while reflecting poorly on their opponents. You should try to steer the middle course as a journalist.

The use of adjectives and adverbs introduces the most obvious cases of bias. To a police officer on duty, a protester's peaceful resistance may appear to be violent obstruction. When an injured person is waiting for an ambulance, the ambulance driver may believe he is driving quickly.

Quotes

When you use words in quotes, you're on safer ground. As a result, the reader will be able to assess the bias through the eyes of the person you quote. (In radio or television, it is preferable to use actuality, which is a recording of people speaking the actual words.)

Examine the differences between these two sentences describing the same crime in the following example.

Take note of how the magistrate and the accused have opposing perspectives on the crime:

"These were mean and despicable thefts, carried out against a defenceless family for no good reason," the magistrate said.

"I've never committed a robbery. I simply took from the wealthy and returned it to the poor," the defendant stated:

Don't make snap decisions or judgements. Publish the words in quotes and leave it up to your readers or listeners to decide. Using quotes has the added benefit of allowing you to use much more lively language - the words that the people themselves used.

Editorial Process

The editing process is broken down into several steps, each of which involves reading the same text several times with a different focus each time.

The first step must be completed first. Step F should be completed last. The rest can be completed in whatever order you find most efficient. Some editors prefer to clean up all the details first, then look at the big picture, while others prefer to address the big-picture issues first, then fix the details later.

Step A: Read the text.

Without editing, read it all the way through. The goal is to get a sense of what the text is about, what it entails, and where it's going.

Step B: Fine-toothed comb.

Make sure there are no typos, punctuation errors, or usage or grammar errors, and that everything is in style.

Step C: Consider the big picture

Make sure the text's structure makes sense. Is the data in the correct order? Is it easy to transition from one idea to the next? Is everything explained in detail? Do you have any unanswered questions? Is there any information that's missing?

Step D: Double-checking the facts

Make sure everything is in order. Names and titles should be double-checked. Examine the dates and locations. Make the calculations. Compare summary summaries of reports, data, or research to the original data. Examine all of your options.

Step E: Revise

"Revise" is a broad term that encompasses a variety of tasks, including removing redundancies, trimming wordy text, possibly trimming for length, and ensuring that no other editing has introduced gaps or errors in the story. The fact-checking stage may be followed by the revision stage; once the writer has answered any open questions and filled in any gaps in the story, some paragraphs may require updating.

Step F: Select a display type

Many editors also write display type - headlines, headers, photo captions, and summaries. It's best to do this after the text has been finalised and no further significant changes are expected.

Further Reading:

- ✓ *The SAGE Handbook of Media Processes and Effects, by Robin L. Nabi and Mary Beth Oliver | Sep 11, 2016*