The Collaborative Relationship Between Technical Editor and Writer

The technical editor-author relationship is often a complex dynamic. The technical editor's responsibilities include review, constructive critique, and revision of an author's written work. Additionally, the technical editor should communicate to the author that he is willingly available to provide guidance and support.

The technical editor also functions as an intermediary between the author and the audience and serves the needs of both. The function and value of editing are clear to technical editors. However, technical editors need to understand how authors perceive technical editors and editorial functions. According to Carolyn Rude, “Because editing involves evaluation and emendation of a writer's work, the relationship between technical editor and author can become adversarial...Relationships fail for three reasons: poor writing or editing, poor management, and oversized egos. Writers justifiably resent unnecessary or incorrect intervention in a text. Unnecessary delays in work by either writer or technical editor, or poor communication among all members of the production team will create stress. Egos may interfere with the role of making the document work for readers. A writer may regard technical editorial comments as personal criticism and become defensive. A technical editor may develop a
contemptuous attitude about the writing that only encourages defensiveness." (Rude 36)

The technical editor should assume a proactive role by initiating a positive and cooperative relationship. It is imperative that technical editors develop good interpersonal intelligence and relationship strategies to effectively communicate with writers. Effective management, good communication, and professionalism are paramount to the success of any editing or publication project.

The scope of the editor–writer relationship can occur in many different professional contexts. The ultimate success of the project and the quality of mutual professional experience depends largely upon a productive relationship between technical editor and writer. According to Thomas H. Wheeler, “As complex as they are crucial, these relationships range from harmonious partnerships to acrimonious feuds, and they typically entail an array of issues: strategic readership definition), legal (copyright, contracts), technical (grammar, punctuation), aesthetic (tone, pacing), and interpersonal (teamwork). For constructive collaborations, writers and technical editors must understand their goals, roles, and guidelines; communicate clearly and in a timely fashion; respect each other’s abilities; and accommodate each other’s reasonable expectations.”

The technical editor must hone interpersonal skills to initiate a collaborative, productive and processional experience, for both writer and technical editor. By
introducing himself before the project begins, the technical editor can establish a positive rapport with the writer. The technical editor also needs to explore the writer’s perceptions and discuss expectations. It is essential to collaborate and define the intended audience for the piece, to determine tone and style. The creation of a realistic timeline will outline the communication/feedback process and establish regular check-in and review times. This will keep the writer informed, so he is not overwhelmed and by too many revisions at end of the project. Both the writer and editor can collaboratively create a style sheet to incorporate document consistency. This will involve the technical editor in the design process, rather than just being involved in the later stage revision process.

In the book *Technical Editing*, author John Mancuso states “The technical copy editor must be a diplomat, in addition to being a language craftsman. If you attempt to force language corrections on technically oriented people, you are doomed to serve in the narrow scope of the ‘comma merchant’.” (Mancuso 32). Jo Mackiewicz and Kathryn Riley liken the editorial role to that of a therapist, in their article *The Technical Copy Editor as Diplomat: Linguistic Strategies for Balancing Clarity and Politeness*. “While diplomat and therapist metaphors are in some ways quite different, they do share common ground: both place the technical editor in more of a cooperative, advisory role than an authoritarian one.”
Any collaborative project requires mutual respect among collaborators to have a successful outcome and a mutual professional experience for those involved. While the collaborators do not need to be friends or even like one another, they must have a mutual professional respect. They need to acknowledge that each person has a unique perspective and makes important contributions. This understanding of synergy is necessary to harness the talents of both technical editor and writer, and to create a successful, collaborative project.

Bibliography


