



A Copy Editor's Toolbox



Before I became an editor, I thought editors provided feedback and suggestions based on their own opinion and experience, but this is only part of how editors do their job. As a copy editor and proofreader, I have many tools to make sure I'm consistent with the standards in the publishing industry.

In the introduction of *Proofreading Secrets of Best-Selling Authors*, Kathy Ide explained how she learned to proofread. Her first employer required a note referencing the rule or guideline to substantiate every revision she made. I do the same to make sure my edits aren't based on what I think sounds right. This also helps the author learn and understand my revisions.

My editors toolbox consists of style guides, a few industry references, software, the right mindset, and my process.

Style Guides*

Style guides, also called style manuals or branding guides, are reference manuals containing rules and guidelines for citation, punctuation, formatting, capitalization, and other elements of writing. The purpose of a style guide is to establish standards and consistency in a field of publishing.

I rely first on [Christian Writer's Manual of Style \(CWMS\)](#) as the standard of style in the Christian publishing industry. It consists of the most common content from the [Chicago Manual of Style \(CMOS\)](#) used in Christian publishing.

Next, I refer to the [Chicago Manual of Style](#) as the authoritative reference work for authors, editors, proofreaders, indexers, copywriters, designers, and publishers.

Other common style guides include the [Associated Press Stylebook](#) for journalism and business, the [Modern Language Association \(MLA\)](#) for humanities and cultural studies, and the [American Psychological Association \(APA\)](#) for academic and scholarly publications.

References*

I rely on a few other references recommended by The Christian Editor Network.

- [Merriam-Webster Dictionary](#)
- Books by [Kathy Ide](#), Owner of [Christian Editing Network](#), the parent company of [The Christian PEN](#), [Christian Editor Connection](#), the [PEN Institute](#), and [PENCON](#).
 - [Proofreading Secrets Of Best-Selling Authors](#)
 - [Editing Secrets Of Best-Selling Authors](#)
 - [Capitalization Dictionary](#)
- [The Grammar Book](#) by Jane Strauss, Lester Kaufman, Tom Stern

*This section includes affiliate links

Software

- [ProWritingAid](#)

I've tried them all, but I settled on ProWritingAid a few years ago, and never looked back. ProWritingAid is easy to use, and it has the most comprehensive reports for the best price.

- [PerfectIt](#)

I recently purchased PerfectIt after a trial of almost thirty minutes! PerfectIt catches inconsistencies and anomalies throughout a manuscript. It saves me endless hours and countless headaches. PerfectIt recently partnered with the Chicago Manual of Style, so it will make sure the manuscript is consistent, saving me tons of time looking things up myself.

Mindset

So many self-published authors dream of landing a contract with a traditional publishing house as the ultimate validation of our skills. A casual reference to our agent during dinner conversation—that's when we know we've made it!

And yet, many traditionally published authors express heightened insecurity about their abilities. Why?

Editing.

I learned there is no writer's block like harsh editor the day I met a choked-up author talk about giving up after getting her manuscript back. My heart ached for her as I bit my tongue instead of yelling "Fire her! Let me help you!"

I'm an author, too, and I know your words are precious. I treat your manuscript with the same respect and love I'd want from an editor for my own stories. My job is to correct mistakes, but it's even more important that we learn and grow together, so we both feel confident and empowered to spread the gospel.

Your stories are from and to Jesus, so your voice is always my first priority. I rely on my knowledge, experience, and tools to follow the rules, but writing is an art, and rules are meant to be broken. I'm a trained, professional extra pair of eyes. I'm here to give you honest, constructive feedback in love, to make your story the best it can be, but I'm not here to write your story for you. I've got enough of my own to write!

Just like when I write, I edit and proofread with Jesus in prayer. My work, and how I treat His authors, is a reflection of Him. He gave me the ability and desire to help share His message, and I never want to be a stumbling block for the gospel.

Process

Every editor has their own process, and that method can change with time and experience. I start high-level and gradually zoom in.

I begin with a read through to get to know the piece, so I don't snuff out the author's voice during edits. I try not to touch anything unless it's totally blatant, like a spelling error or missing period. I'm reading for an overall feel of the author's voice, message, intent, and flow.

Then I get to work fixing things like sentence structure, passive voice, and clarity. If I think a re-write may help, I'll make a suggestion in the comments.

Next, I read through the manuscript aloud to see how it sounds as I proofread. Then I run it through ProWritingAid, followed by PerfectIt.

Then one more time...!

I print the manuscript, and use a ruler I made to read through it line by line out loud.



Conclusion

As you can see, editing involves so much more than making sure the manuscript sounds and looks right. Publishers want authors to hire editors because editing is another dimension of publishing, with just as many layers as writing. Editors are more than an extra pair of eyeballs. They are professionals with a specialized skill set designed to make you and your writing look their best.

There is one more tool I haven't told you about. It's an editor's cheat sheet, referred to as a style sheet. But it's not just for editors. You'll want one for yourself. So join me here again tomorrow to learn about what a style sheet is, how you can use it while you write, and how to make one of your own. And if you don't want to make one from scratch, no worries. I'll give you mine to get you started!