

Sample Essay

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Survey in Literature

The importance of editing

The world has changed a lot over the past century. From cars that get better gas mileage to new found cures for diseases, everything is evolving. The reason is simple: to make our lives easier. There is nothing wrong with this on the surface, but look below and you will see that with every gain - there is a loss. Consider the technological advances in word processing. Microsoft for example, has created a tool called "grammar check," which gives people the option of having the computer edit their paper. However, the program sort of puts a negative spin on the editing process. It makes editing seem easy and simple, when in reality it is a time consuming and dirty job. Editing is and will always be vital to writing.

I had an e-mail interview with an editor by the name of Anne Wood. She currently lives in Rumford and is working freelance as an editor. During Anne's career in education, she was often the "unofficial in-house editor" for a variety of documents and projects. After having a conversation with her, I could tell she loves everything that writing has to offer.

"I'm an avid reader, I love words, I respect quality writing," Anne expresses. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree at St. Joseph's College in Maine and a Master of Arts from University of Maine in Orono, both of which are English degrees. Anne's favorite genre of writing is the essay. "It's something that I enjoy for the flexibility that it affords," Anne goes on to say. After retiring from a long career of teaching English and French, she began her editing business. In the last several years she has edited for corporations, a publishing company, and many private clients. She takes pride in her work and feels great joy when authors are published or recognized. "Editing can be solitary work; most of the time I never see my clients," she explains. Anne Wood doesn't search for work; work finds her. "They come to me by word of mouth; I don't advertise," Anne says. She lives in what could possibly be the driest and smelliest town in Maine, there is nothing but woods. I find it very impressive for an editor to make a name for herself in the woods of Maine.

Editing a manuscript is the last step in the writing process and can be very tricky. It's tedious work that must be completed in order to have a final product. When an editor edits his or her writing, he or she covers these five elements: grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and voice ("The Writing Process-Editing").

When looking at grammar, the editor concentrates on verb forms and tenses. Speaking in the same tense throughout a paper, whether it be past, present, or future makes the writing clear. The editor then carefully checks the

grammar that gives him or her the most difficulty. Spelling is a major yet minor step in the writing process. Don't get me wrong, spelling is what makes or breaks a paper, so it's important to have no errors. It is however, the easiest step to complete. An editor simply reads through the writing, and if he or she finds themselves pausing at certain points, it is probably due to spelling mistakes ("The Writing Process-Editing"). Now "Spell Check" can fix many spelling mistakes, however, it doesn't fix words that are spelled correctly that shouldn't be there, like the words to, two, or too. The computer program cannot evaluate meaning.

Punctuation can be very tricky and can cause difficulty for many people. While revising a paper, the editor searches for any run-on sentences or sentence fragments. Correcting this is fairly simple. Usually the only thing that needs to be changed is the punctuation. The editor then checks to see whether or not he or she has correctly used commas, colons, and semi-colons.

Another minor step is capitalization. An editor reads through the paper again and again, and makes sure all of the proper nouns are capitalized. From names to countries, or cities to rivers, they must all be capitalized ("The Writing Process-Editing").

The last step, tone, is important in writing. If a paper has great voice, someone who is reading it will be attracted to it and continue reading it with ease. A paper that doesn't include a strong voice weakens the paper, can cause anyone reading it to lose interest, and possibly confuse the reader. If an author

has great voice, the voice will tell the reader what kind of person he is, for a good writer will put their personality in his or her writing.

Evaluation of tone, style, and voice is something grammar check and spell check cannot do. Computers can only fix spelling errors and underline something that doesn't make sense based on the patterns that the computer has been taught, whether it be a punctuation error or fragment sentence. A computer cannot evaluate the voice of a paper. How could it? A computer can't tell if a certain part sounds great, or a part sounds a little weak. It can't tell if the paper is getting off topic. It takes a human being, preferably an editor, to make the decision. An editor can actually give feedback, advice, and present alternate ways of expressing something. Humans can give the writer ideas, where a computer only shows the things it "thinks" are incorrect in the paper.

The editor needs to ask questions about the written material and by doing so try to pull more information out of the author. Ask questions like: What did you mean here? What's your favorite part? Have you said all you can say about this subject? By asking questions the overall text and manuscript improves.

One of the people most inspiring to Anne Wood is Max Perkins. "Max Perkins was perhaps the all-time insightful editor who helped people get published," Anne remarks, after I ask her about the history of editing. Max Perkins was an editor for some of the best-known American writers: F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe, and numerous others. He was born in New York City on September 20, 1884. He graduated from Harvard with

a great education, and started his career by working as a reporter for the New York Times ("Maxwell Perkins"). Perkins later found work at the Scribners publishing house where he worked as an advertising manager. What helped Perkins become such a successful editor was his drive to get authors published. He fought for anyone who was worth fighting for. Perkins acted as a guide and in some cases a father.

In 1929, Hemingway's father committed suicide, and because Maxwell and he became friends shortly before the incident, Perkins stepped up and filled the position of a father (Dupuis). During their twenty year relationship, Perkins obtained an extraordinary reputation, for he was the one who tamed the ferocious lion. Maxwell knew what type of man Hemingway was and knew how to deal with his arrogant and hostile moods. Perkins also knew when it was safe to give advice and criticism. With that being said, it was Perkins's editorial skills that steered Hemingway in the right direction. With Perkins help, Hemingway was able to write all of his fictional books (Dupuis).

Perkins had such a significant influence on Hemingway when Perkins died in 1947, Ernest Hemingway didn't publish another book for seven years. This amazing man wasn't just an editor, he was a critic, career manager, and to most, a friend.

In 1917, Perkins began conversing with a twenty-four year old man, who had attended Princeton and Perkins thought he could blossom into an aspiring writer. "Max's colleagues used to jokingly say that he could look at an aspiring

writer and assess his/her future on the spot," Anne says. It took time, but because Perkins is so dedicated to his editing, it only took a few rewrites and he was able to get the young man's book published. That young man was F. Scott Fitzgerald. In 1920 Fitzgerald became the youngest writer to be published at Scribner, and his book, *This Side of Paradise*, brought in a new era for the business ("Maxwell Perkins").

Technology has indeed come along way, but it is still nowhere close to the sophistication of the human brain. It's impossible for a computer to have the characteristics of a top notch editor like Maxwell Perkins. The world today just doesn't have the ability to program human attributes of thinking into a computer. Grammar Check can fix the nuts-and-bolts of a paper or book, but it takes the human brain to make the final decision of what stays and what goes. "The editor's work is thousands of miles beyond computer Spell Check and Grammar Check," Anne went on to say.

Computer editing will always be a great way to get minor kinks out of papers. But however smart it may be, it can't discuss or always select the best fitting word. An editor's job is to decipher a pile of words and find the story that lurks beneath the surface. Editors must be able to point out the strong parts and decide whether the author needs to spice it up by adding more details. "Every manuscript needs an overhaul," Anne explained, "You may have to redirect your author to spend more time on certain thoughts and to delete material that lacks energy." An important rule to keep in mind is to never discourage the author by

viciously criticizing his or her work. "An editor must be tactful and kind," Anne explains.

There is a bond that an author and editor share; which helps them to become successful. They must know everything about one another; each others background, history, and personality. They must be able to share everything. For that's what life is about sharing and exchanging stories. Editing will always have an epic role in the writing process, no matter how far technology comes.