

THE EDITOR'S EYE

A Practical Guide to Transforming Your Book from Good to Great

STACY ENNIS

More than 80 percent of people aspire to write a book at some point in their lifetime, but less than 1 percent actually get published. Why?

Many are held back because they underestimate the power of editing. Editing is integral to the writing process, yet soon-to-be authors are often intimidated at the prospect of working with an editor. But what if there was a way that editing could make writing a book less stressful and more enjoyable?

The Editor's Eye: A Practical Guide to Transforming Your Book from Good to Great by book coach and editor Stacy Ennis shows you how editing can help you write your best book. Whether you plan to self-publish or land a book deal with a publishing house, *The Editor's Eye*

takes you through the ins and outs of the often-overwhelming book-editing process. Ennis teaches you how to dive deep into your writing and work alongside professional editors who will help you push against your stylistic fences, prod the walls of your research, and test the integrity of your ideas. Would-be and experienced authors alike will discover how to:

Master the basics: Understand the four core editing stages.

Write with an editor's eye: Streamline your writing with self-editing tips.

Hire and work with editors: Learn what to expect to pay and how to collaborate.

Revise painlessly: Implement editor and reader feedback with ease.

Learn from the pros: Get advice from 20 publishing experts, authors, and editors.

An indispensable, no-nonsense guide, *The Editor's Eye* will give you more confidence in your writing as you move toward the ultimate goal: publication. *The Editor's Eye* is the first book of a planned Author Education series, educational guides for turning creative ideas into publishable prose.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stacy Ennis (stacyennis.com) is a book and magazine editor, writer, book coach, and speaker. Her greatest joy is helping people achieve their book-writing dreams, and she has had the opportunity to work with a diverse group of authors in varied genres, editing several chart-toppers. After teaching writing and English language arts in the Dominican Republic and Vietnam, Stacy returned to the U.S., where she was the founding

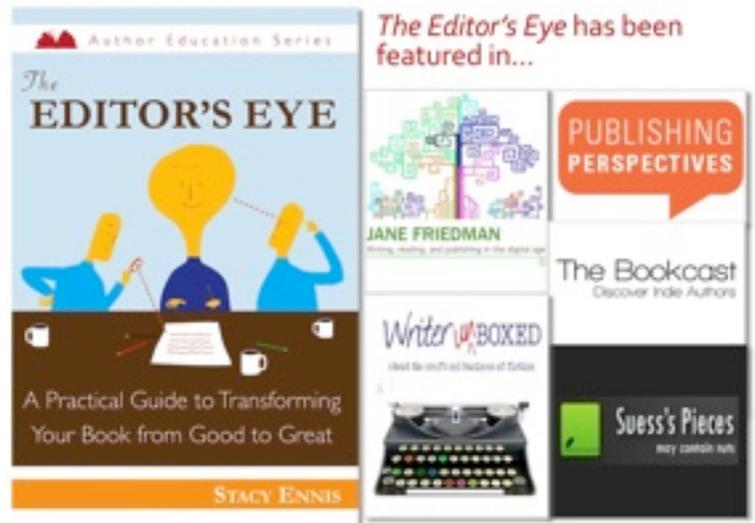
managing editor of a lifestyle magazine. She is also the former executive editor of *Healthy Living Made Simple*, a Sam's Club magazine that reaches over 8 million readers. She has a bachelor's in writing with a minor in visual art and will complete her master's in professional writing and editing from the University of Cincinnati in 2014. Stacy lives in Boise, Idaho, with her husband, daughter, and two cats. In her free time, she enjoys running, reading, traveling, and spending time outdoors.

PRESS

"I have been delighted to work with Stacy Ennis on several books in the past year. ... *The Editor's Eye* on your bookshelf is like having Stacy on speed dial—you can get her help for your book whenever you need it." – **Joel Lund, author of *Watson's Way***

"Stacy has a great command of prose and a deep respect for the authors she works with. ... I am a huge advocate of Stacy's work, and I look forward to using *The Editor's Eye* and her phenomenal writing and editing talents on my next book." – **Whit Mitchell, author of *Working in Sync***

"With an uncanny eye for what the reader will perceive, Stacy brought out the best in me as an author—even helping me create whole new concepts that I now use in my consulting work. *The Editor's Eye* captures Stacy's wisdom and insights as an editor. I'm looking forward to using it and working with her while writing my next book." – **Bob Faw, author of *Energize! Ignite Passion and Performance with User-Friendly Brain***



The Editor's Eye has been featured in Publishing Perspectives, JaneFriedman.com, Writer Unboxed, and The Bookcast. For a complete list, see the "Press" area at <http://www.nightowlspress.com/e-book-store/the-editors-eye/>.

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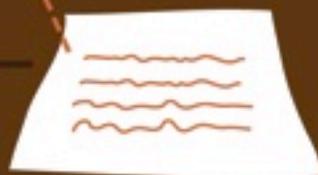
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Introduction, Chapter 1*



Author Education Series

The

EDITOR'S EYE



A Practical Guide to Transforming
Your Book from Good to Great

STACY ENNIS

The Editor's Eye

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO
TRANSFORMING YOUR BOOK
FROM GOOD TO GREAT

STACY ENNIS

FOREWORD BY MARYANNA YOUNG



Night Owls Press

The Editor's Eye: A Practical Guide to Transforming Your Book From Good to Great.

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For Doug and Lily, who make everything worthwhile.

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The Editor's Eye

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO
TRANSFORMING YOUR BOOK
FROM GOOD TO GREAT

::: FOREWORD :::

Books make a difference in our lives. The late Charlie “Tremendous” Jones, one of the best motivational speakers to have ever lived, said, “You are the same today as you will be in five years except for two things: the people you meet and the books you read.”

Books can create shifts in mind-set about how we view the world, relate to others, and work and play. Some books entertain us or encourage us to see things from a different perspective; others help us solve problems or understand new concepts. Because each reader processes the words in a book through unique filters based on life experiences, each reader can find individual meaning within the same pages.

The desire to create and share meaningful content and stories is what calls writers to write. When writers answer this calling, readers benefit from their craft.

Statistics show that more than 80 percent of individuals would like to write a book at some point in their lifetimes. So, why don’t more people do it? I believe there are two reasons: They think they will have to write the whole book on their own, and they don’t understand the power of the editing process. A while ago, I didn’t understand it, either. Unfortunately, these fears keep many people from writing altogether.

What I have experienced in my last decade of giving workshops and speaking with literally hundreds—maybe thousands—of students, writers, and those new to the publishing industry is they don’t understand the positive power of editing and how it’s a necessary part of the writing process. The majority of newbie writers and authors fear editors, thinking they will be like their former schoolteachers, marking up work and returning it with no explanation. This lack of understanding and deep-seated anxiety keeps many, many potentially great authors from ever even beginning to write...let alone getting published.

Don’t get me wrong: There are some editors who are a little intimidating and make me want to reconsider whether I can write anything at all. Since I was a mediocre English student at best, I once had the same apprehensions toward having my writing edited—until I realized

how much great editing could make my work far exceed my own natural skill level.

You're bound to hear many colorful analogies about what editors do and how editors can help writers. I like to think of them this way: Editors are like angel investors in the business world. They are willing to invest their time, heart, and soul into making your work sound good, feel powerful, and reach deep into the minds of your readers. And they do all this for a moderate amount of money and a small amount of recognition.

So, I will make my point very clear.

Good editors can make all the difference in your ability to thrive in the world of writing and publishing. Inevitably, there is a gulf between a raw manuscript and a published book that all writers find intimidating to cross. That gap is widest during the first draft, but gradually closes as a book gets edited and revised by the author and editor. Editors can be your very best advocates in helping you close the gap between "draft" and "ready for publication." Editors can help you take your writing from good to great. And they will help you get there in less time and with less stress than if you were to do it on your own. Editing is a very critical step in getting a work ready for publication. Regardless of the skill level of an author, it takes the eyes of a strong editor or team of editors to polish a book to the point where it can match any other in the marketplace. Without good editing, a project is an epic fail and the book never reaches the readers for which it was intended.

When I met Stacy Ennis a few years back, I quickly identified how her personality and professional skill could powerfully impact the authors we work with at Aloha Publishing. A majority of our authors are busy professionals and leaders in their areas of expertise, which range from health to parenting to business. With her background as both a creative literary professional and teacher, Stacy has a unique way of getting the best content out of first-time authors and refining the work of more seasoned writers. Many of the books she has edited for Aloha have helped establish authors as nationally recognized thought leaders.

The Editor's Eye will open up a whole new world for you in your understanding of the different types of editing, how you can improve your writing process, how to find an editor, how to sign a contract with an independent editor, and how to effectively use the editing available through your publisher. Most importantly, you'll learn how your extraordinary ideas, given the touch of a powerful wordsmith, can turn you from an unknown into a best-selling author.

Gaining insight into the many editing options available to authors helps individuals recognize that their ideas and stories have the power to change lives, entertain, and provide new insights about the world. *The Editor's Eye* gives you this understanding and more. Drawn from Stacy's experience as a professional editor and packed with interviews with writing and editing professionals, this book will ignite a fire within you to write, write, and write more—and then turn it over to your editor.

You may have picked up this book because you want to start writing a book of your own, or you may be a seasoned author hoping to gain a greater understanding of the editing process. I am convinced that if you can do your part by getting your best ideas from your brain to paper, a highly qualified editor can help you take them the rest of the way. I encourage you to be fearless with your writing ambition and spend the time to find a great editor; if you do, you may discover that your writing can exceed your highest expectations.

Maryanna Young

CEO of Aloha Publishing and author of *Blank to Book: Idea to Amazon in 150 Days*

::: INTRODUCTION :::

A Book to Help You Write Yours

The Inspiration

A while ago, I was scheduled to talk to a group of writers at the Idaho Book Extravaganza, a regional gathering of people in the publishing industry, including many aspiring authors working toward the dream of publishing a book. As I set up for the session, “Write Your Best Book: The Writing and Editing Process,” I remember looking out at the large, empty room and thinking there were too many seats to be filled. After all, my session was the first slot of the entire conference (and an early one at that), and there were three other classes taking place at the same time—one put on by a best-selling fiction author, another by a successful CEO of a social media firm, and one by a sought-after memoir writing coach.

With those choices, who would be interested in editing? Writers usually take classes on writing; editing is an afterthought and a dreaded one at that. But, as I finished setting up, I was surprised to see that the tables were nearly full. By the time I was ready to introduce myself, the room was packed. People sat shoulder to shoulder with their notepads ready and pens poised, eager to learn. The class went wonderfully, and the audience was engaged, inquisitive, and genuinely interested in everything I shared with them. There were a lot of questions about the types of editing out there and how to hire and work with an editor, and some people even voiced their concerns and fears about the editing process. The conversations I had afterward reinforced connections I’d already made through my experiences as an editor and led me to several realizations.

When it comes to what writers generally know about editing and how it relates to the writing process, there are three things I've observed:

#1 Most writers don't know much about the book-editing process.

Over the years, I've worked with a wide range of authors across a variety of fiction and nonfiction genres, helping each one through different stages of the writing process. Each time, I've been surprised to learn that most authors have a limited understanding of the editing process. Most of the time, they see editing as a vague, unpleasant, and slightly mysterious step that happens along the way.

#2 Most writers don't realize that editing is an integral part of writing.

When I ran a high school English program in the Dominican Republic, I had the opportunity to see students work on their compositions through waves of revisions. It was from teaching and editing that I began to understand the greater nuances of writing and the critical role editing plays in the evolution of an idea, an image, those first words on paper—into a finished, coherent piece.

Later, when I was the managing editor of a local magazine in Boise, Idaho, which I helped found, many of the writers I worked with didn't really understand the necessity of self-editing when writing their articles. I often encountered disconnects between what the writers wanted to write (or were assigned) and the final articles they sent me. In essence, they had trouble evaluating their own work. Furthermore, many saw editing as something separate from the writing process. In the course of managing the magazine, I also started noticing some similarities between book and magazine editing—things that all writers can do, no matter the medium, to streamline the writing process and make editing a part of the creative process.

#3 Most writers really do want to learn more about editing.

The moment I began my talk in front of that crowded room at the Idaho Book Extravaganza, I knew there was an unaddressed need among writers to learn about editing. I also recognized that the drive among writers to improve their craft and write their best books could only be

realized through mastering the art of self-editing and taking advantage of professional editing.

So, this is where my book can make a difference: It addresses those three concerns and explains how editing can help you write a better book. And not just a good book—a great one.

How to Use This Book

Whether you're an already published author who wants to better understand the editing process, a would-be author considering self-publishing or pursuing the traditional publishing route, or a writer who just wants a better grasp on refining your own work, this book is for you. *The Editor's Eye* is your in-depth introduction to the self-editing and professional editing processes. You'll learn how to transform the way you write, gain insight into how to hire and work with editors, and master each stage of the book-editing process. Everything you need to know to get your book into best-selling shape is in this book.

Each chapter touches on an important part of the editing process. Chapter 1 starts by debunking all of the old myths about book editing and gives you the truth about the editing process, including the idea of “killing your darlings” and more. Chapter 2 covers editing fundamentals, including a detailed look at the four stages of editing and important terminology you should know.

Chapters 3 and 4 take a fresh look at the entire writing process from planning to publication—from an editor's point of view. You'll learn how integrating editing into your writing early on can dramatically improve your drafts right from the moment you add words to a blank page.

Chapter 5 details how to hire and work with an editor, including important questions to ask prospective editors; it also gets very specific on what you can expect to pay, how to work with an editor in another city, and other essential information about working collaboratively and productively with your editor. I draw from my experience working across distances to help you understand how to work digitally and why it's not so hard. In fact, the first book I edited was for a client in Boise, Idaho, and I edited it from my apartment in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. If I can do that, you can definitely work with an editor in a different U.S. city, and I'll show you how.

But, perhaps most importantly, each chapter in this book is as practical and hands-on as possible, with real examples of tools, tips, and strategies you can actually use as you write your book. You'll also get templates for outlines, examples of how editors can improve your writing, and samples of a reader feedback form, an editing checklist, an agreement letter, and a manuscript style guide.

While my experiences inspired me to share my expertise with you, I didn't stop there: I interviewed 20 industry leaders in publishing, including editors, owners of publishing houses, and authors. Full interviews are included throughout, too, from several important names: ghostwriter, coauthor, and book doctor Tim Vandehey; independent writer, editor, and author Christy Karras; commercial freelancer, business coach, and author of three award-winning books, including *The Well-Fed Self-Publisher*, Peter Bowerman; freelance writer and author of *My So-Called Freelance Life*, Michelle Goodman; and number one international best-selling fiction author Vincent Zandri. These are people who really know their stuff and have a following because of it, and many of them also happen to be my colleagues, people I'd trust with my own work. If you'd like a list of all the people interviewed, please see the Acknowledgments at the back of this book.

There are several ways to use this book, and it's designed for authors at many stages. If you're new to book writing and editing, you should read this book cover to cover, especially the section on the writing process and self-editing. If you're reading this book with a completed manuscript sitting next to you, it might be a good idea to skip the sections on self-editing for now (Chapters 3 and 4) and instead focus on hiring and working with editors (Chapter 5). Whatever your situation, *The Editor's Eye* will be an invaluable part of your book-writing process.

But this book isn't really about me or the experts I interviewed—this book is ultimately about you. It's about helping you get to where you want to be, whether it's starting or finishing a book, taking control of a draft that keeps escaping your grasp, or another equally important goal. It's about helping you reach your dreams and enjoy the process of writing and refining your book. Because, as I'll show you over the next few chapters, editing can be just as enjoyable as writing.

Let's get started.

::: ONE :::

Rethinking What You Know About Book Editing

I once asked a large group of writers, “What is the definition of editing?”

The room was still, no one daring to speak. Finally, someone said, “Painful.” Everyone chuckled, but nodded, all seeming to relate to this description. After some more prompting, a woman in the back of the room slowly raised her hand, then offered, “Cleaning up written copy.” A few more ideas bubbled up around the room, most of them dealing with some sort of revision after writing is finished.

Were they right?

Well, yes...aside from the pain part. They were right, but not totally. Editing does include those things, but it is also so much more.

Editing by Spell-Checker Alone and Other Misconceptions About Editing

For the purposes of this book, **editing*** is defined as all of the things done to a piece of writing to get it to its final state. That means editing takes place at all stages of the book-writing process, from conception to print, and is an integral part of the creation of a **manuscript**. After all, how good would a book be if its final version was based on the very first draft of an outline, included the first ideas that popped into the author’s head, and was printed immediately after the first draft was written, without anyone reviewing it? The quality would be questionable at best.

* Note on the text: Throughout this book, the first instance of terms included in the Terminology section at the end of Chapter 2 is bolded.

In fact, you can hire an **editor** *before* you even start writing your book to help get your outline organized, do some of your research, and keep you motivated. An editor also helps you shape the manuscript as you write by offering feedback and suggestions. Genevieve DeGuzman, the managing editor at Night Owls Press, says editing is about figuring out the writer's intentions, what he* is trying to say, and helping him say it in the best way possible. "Editors do more than just fiddle with punctuation and correct typos," she explains. "The editing process is less about putting semicolons in the right places and more about engaging with the author's content and ideas."

More than just a sieve to filter surface errors, editing is a special kind of alchemy that prepares a draft for reader scrutiny. Editors do this by diving deep into your work, pushing against your stylistic fences, prodding the walls of your research, and testing the integrity of your ideas. And in the end, they push you to become a better writer. The important thing to remember is this: Editing is an intrinsic part of the writing process, taking place before a book is written, while writing, after the first draft, and before and after a book is sent to book design.

Writing and editing go hand in hand, and trying to write without any consideration of the various stages of editing and revision

shortchanges your manuscript. One of my favorite quotes about the interplay of writing and editing comes from Lois Johnson Rew's *Editing for Writers*: "Editing and writing are not two separate and parallel paths to [an] end. Editing and writing should converge on one path."

In fact, many times, great writing emerges from the trial by fire of several **editing rounds**; it's rare to see a first draft that's pitch-perfect. There's always room for improvement, and an editor's comments get you thinking about your book in a new light. Furthermore, a close rereading of your own work prompts you to reexamine narrative elements you once thought invincible. When editing, you might find yourself asking, "Oh, why didn't I think of that?" Approaching editing as what it is—an integral step in writing your book—will vastly improve the way you write and develop ideas, narratives, characters, and plots.



Editing is defined as all of the things done to a piece of writing to get it to its final state.

* Note on the text: To avoid using the clunky construction of "he/she" or other variations, I switch between male and female pronouns throughout the book.

What about you? How do you perceive the editing process? Does it feel like a necessary evil, like taking out the trash on Sunday nights? Does it make your stomach churn to think about handing over your manuscript to an editor? Do you worry that your editor will hate your book...or make it worse?

I'm here to tell you these feelings are all normal. It's natural to fear the unknown—the uncertainty of what an editor will do to your work. You may ask yourself, “How will my work change in the hands of another?” The creative passion that started you writing in the first place suddenly gives way to fear of scrutiny. After all, many of us have very little experience with the editing process, with much of that experience limited to college or high school English classes or writing workshops, in which a fellow student scribbled some unhelpful comments about your dangling participles or misplaced modifiers.

Here's a cold dose of reality: The editing process is long and involved. It's more than just having a peer read through your work, and it's definitely more than running spell-check or making sure you put commas in the right places. It requires an investment of time and money, and most importantly, it demands that you shift your thinking and approach your work with fresh eyes and an open mind.

The Misunderstood Editor

Part of why writers feel ambivalent toward the editing process is that they mistakenly see editors as adversaries. Many authors secretly think of an editor as a warty witch hovering over the computer, delighting in the annihilation of a manuscript. Or they see editors as grim, dictionary-wielding dictators—you know, the kind that uses the word “catachthonian” in everyday speech and culls precious paragraphs? I even had an author once end an e-mail with the words, “With some nervousness,” rather than “Best” or “Sincerely.” There is real apprehension about the editing process, as if editors are waging creative assault on authors' books.

Some writers opt away from using a professional editor, arguing that fellow writers in their peer workshops provide all the help they need. But a skilled editor usually offers much more than any group can. Let's face it: The people in your writing group aren't getting paid to pore over your manuscript with a critical eye, and though they probably do care about your manuscript to some extent, at the end of the day they're mostly there to

improve their own work, not yours. Other writers are also likely not trained in the specific stages of editing, which we'll discuss shortly.

On that note, you'll notice that I often say you should look for a "good" or "highly-skilled" editor; just like anything else—dental work, car repair, home remodeling—hiring the best often results in the best end product. If you scrimp on editing, it will show. And just like a botched car repair, bad editing will have to be fixed sooner or later, and there's no sense wasting money and learning the hard way. When all is said and done, investing more money at the outset of a project is usually the best option; but don't worry, we'll get to how to hire and work with editors in Chapter 5.

While these warnings are all very true, there is good news: A highly-skilled editor can make this otherwise bewildering process a pleasant one, and she can help influence your manuscript in incredible and substantial ways. And I really do mean *substantial*. An editor reads a manuscript with a very specific eye—an editor's eye—putting on both the "editor hat" and the "reader hat," looking for areas in a manuscript that are confusing, don't speak to the intended reader (more on that later), and somehow miss the mark. An editor can take a book from good to great by identifying these areas and, most importantly, offering suggestions and solutions. More than just revising at the sentence level, an editor can impact a book at the idea level, even at the concept level, too.

I tell the authors I work with that I'm there to bring out the best books that already reside within them, to help them share the stories they want to share. The writer-editor relationship should never be an adversarial one. In fact, we are working toward the same goal: to bring out the author's voice and transform a book into something great.

What else can an editor do besides rework your prose and help you refine your ideas? Lots more. If you're going the **traditional publishing** route, she can help you get the manuscript ready to send out and offer hard-won expertise in crafting a book proposal and cover letter. If you're **self-publishing**, whether it's to help build your brand or career, realize your dream of writing a book, or just because you love writing, an editor can help guide you through the publishing process and connect you with other quality vendors, like **cover designers**. When you think about it that way, it's actually a pretty rewarding relationship, right?

If you are writing a book to achieve a specific purpose (say, to attract publicity and then go on the public speaking circuit), consider this: If a developmental editor can help you finish a book two years earlier than you would have on your own, how much will you gain in the time saved? Is it

worth struggling through a process you don't understand—and perhaps having to do it over again—just to save some money? Moreover, think of how much money you could have made or publicity you could have garnered if your book had been out during those two years.

Basically, when it comes to writing a great book, an editor is a trained professional who knows what she's doing. All writers could use someone like that.

Now, before we get into the book-editing particulars, we need to have a candid talk.

“Kill Your Darlings” and Other Truths About Editing

Here's a universal fact: Most writers tend to be resistant toward editing, whether it's out of fear, anxiety, lack of confidence, or a protective stance toward their work. Let's say you've spent months, possibly a year or more, writing your manuscript. Perhaps you've spent four hours every Thursday morning crafting your book, putting everything you have into it, sacrificing free time and time with your friends and family. You think your book is pretty darn good, and you're sure your editor will think so, too.

Then you get the manuscript back from your editor.

As you look through the pages, you see your manuscript seemingly butchered in red ink or electronic marks. You then read her detailed e-mail, including some shocking feedback: “Chapters one, two, three, five, six, and seven are very strong...but chapter four seems a bit off topic. You might consider cutting it.” Suddenly, your beloved writing pen becomes a shield, your nostrils flare, and you find yourself breathing fire. Your mind reeling, you think, *But, but, but...I spent weeks on that chapter!*

This might happen. The editing process is going to feel frustrating at times. As a writer, you are going to be as naturally protective of your work as a parent would be of her child. Having a good attitude toward editing can be difficult, especially when authors are tied to the traditional notion of editing as just fixing errors. If you can view editing as an integral part of the writing process—an extension of it—then you're well on your way toward adopting a more collaborative approach to editing (more on this in Chapter 5). Douse the fire breathing: Your editor really does have your

best interest at heart. Keep an open mind, and be willing to change your work.

My favorite quote on keeping an open mind to editing comes from Stephen King's *On Writing*: "...kill your darlings, kill your darlings, even when it breaks your egocentric little scribbler's heart, kill your darlings."¹ If you need to, write this quote on a piece of paper and tape it to your desk or somewhere in your writing space where you'll see it regularly. And always be ready to kill your darlings.

Here are a few tips for adopting a good editing attitude:

Remember that manuscripts are organic. When you started your manuscript, it was just a blank piece of paper. Just because you added words to it, that doesn't mean it's done; it's an ever-growing, ever-evolving document that can always become something better.

Don't be afraid to kill your darlings. It's okay to let go of something that's not working, whether it's a few words or an entire section. Maybe that deleted section or chapter can be repurposed into a blog post or an article...but it just doesn't belong in your book. Learn how to let it go. In the article "Let us now praise editors," Gary Kamiya puts it this way: "You have to let go of your attachment to the specific words you've written and open yourself to what you were aiming for. You need enough confidence in yourself to accept constructive criticism, some of which can feel like your internal organs are being more or less gently moved around."²

Don't take edits and feedback personally. James C. Wilson, Ph.D., professor of English and journalism and the author of six books, says, "My advice to authors: Be adults. Editing will improve your product. So grow up." Your editor isn't hired to be your friend; his job is to make your manuscript better. A heavily marked-up manuscript doesn't necessarily mean you're a bad writer. An editor's job is to take into account a lot more than your writing skill, and he is also considering other factors, such as the intended audience and purpose of the manuscript (more on this in Chapter 2).

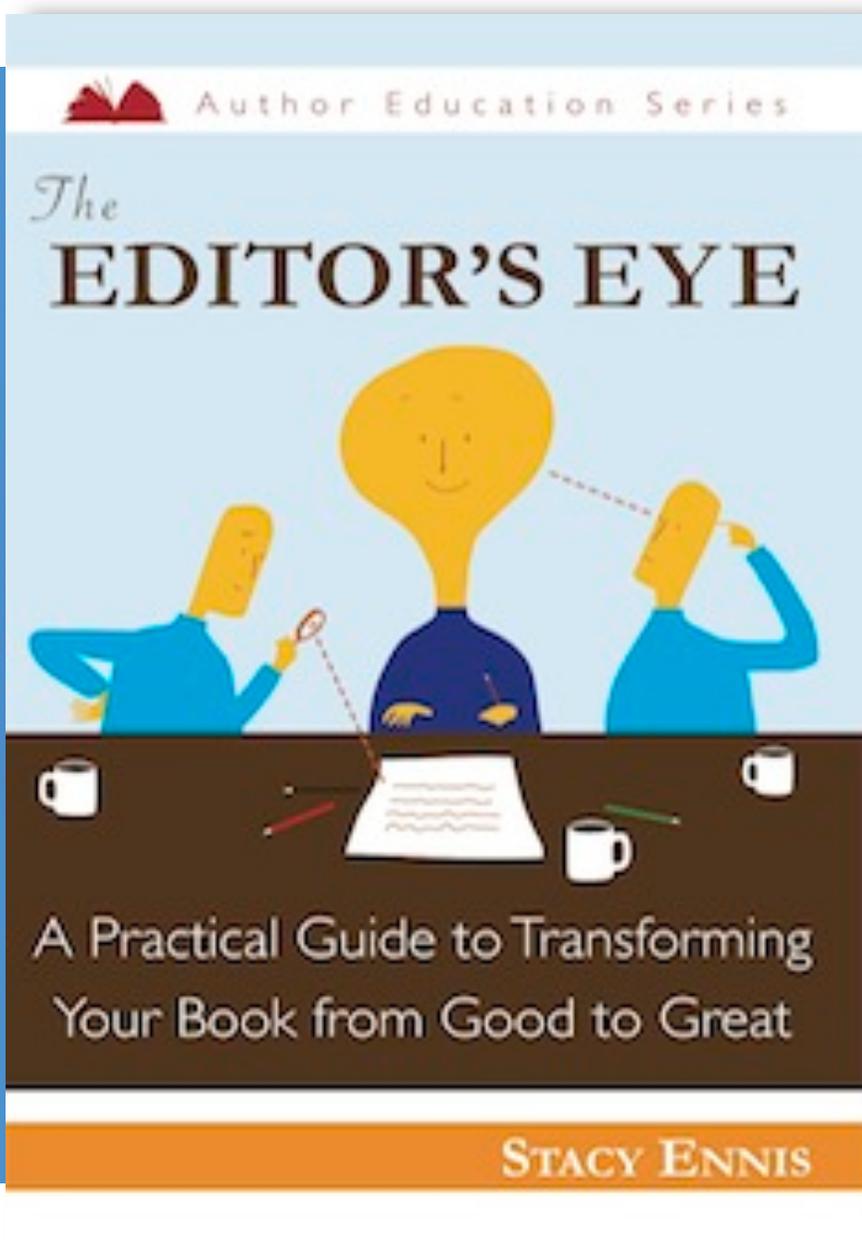
Allot time for the critical phase of editing and rewriting. I once had an author request extensive editing just weeks before the book was supposed to go to design. While his book eventually turned

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out fine, thanks to several 12-hour days on my part and a lot of work on his part, we both agreed his book could have been stronger with more editing time. Don't make the mistake of doing rush editing at the end; give yourself enough time to properly revise.

NOW THAT WE have the truth about the editing process out of the way, let's move into what this whole book-editing process is, anyway. So grab a cup of coffee or tea, settle in, and let's get going. It's time to finish that manuscript!

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