

Nobody's Perfect.

But a good copy editor can make a writer look that way.

Writers are usually too close to their own work to be effective at spotting, assessing, and modifying the thousands of details that must come together to create a truly professional manuscript. Which is exactly why the copy editor was invented.

The copy editor's job is to serve as an extra set of eyes, a vital ally in the challenge to create a composition that is error free and that says exactly what the writer wants it to say. It's a specialized skill that demands a sharp and skeptical eye, sound judgment, a solid grasp of language conventions, and a wide-ranging curiosity.

Looking for Errors in All the Right Places

Risking eyestrain and brain fatigue, the copy editor scours a manuscript's every sentence in an effort to ensure the "4 Cs" — clarity, coherency, consistency, and correctness. We examine five critical areas:

1. Mechanics

The way we use language speaks volumes about our professionalism, thinking processes, and attention to detail. The copy editor works to make sure a thousand mechanical elements are both correct and consistent —

- Spelling
- Punctuation
- Hyphenation
- Capitalization
- Treatment of numbers and words
- Handling of statistics
- Use of abbreviations and acronyms
- Use of italics and boldface type
- Treatment of headings, captions, lists, tables, charts, and graphs
- Format of footnotes, endnotes, other documentation

2. Language

Are there errors or lapses in grammar, syntax, or usage? Is every word in its proper place? Is every word used correctly? Does the manuscript speak with a unified voice? Are comparisons, lists, statistics put into context and phrased in parallel form for easy comprehension?

Is the reading level appropriate for the intended audience?

3. Shape

William Strunk Jr. said it best in *The Elements of Style*: "Writing, to be effective,

must follow closely the thoughts of the writer, but not necessarily in the order in which those thoughts occur. This calls for a scheme or procedure.... The first principle of composition, therefore, is to foresee or determine the shape of what is to come, and pursue that shape."

How successfully has the writer pursued that shape? Are the structure and approach appropriate for the document's content, objective, audience, and medium? Is the material organized so that readers can easily follow? Are the main points clear and prominent? Are sentences or paragraphs too long? Are there "signposts" to guide the reader? Would subheads, graphics, or pull-quotes help?

4. Content

What is the writer's point of view? What is the reader take-away? Are they conveyed accurately and clearly? Are there any internal inconsistencies or discrepancies? Is any wording confusing, ambiguous, or inappropriate to the subject, audience, or publisher? Are there any obvious factual errors?

5. Correlating Parts

Does the table of contents reflect the publication's actual contents? Are cross-references in the text accurate and consistent? Are such elements as footnotes, endnotes, tables, illustrations, and appendices numbered and positioned correctly? Do graphics match their captions?

At Cyrano, we consider copy editing to be both an art and a skill. We pride ourselves on our ability to retain the author's voice and objective, while serving our passion for clearly written, grammatically correct, vibrantly fresh and persuasive English prose.