Chapter 3. Writing and editing are *human* endeavors

"For me, good editing is a… testimony that one's words are worthy enough to require close attention."
—James McConkey, *Nurture for the damn ego*

"Tact is the ability to describe others as they see themselves."—Abraham Lincoln

"Writing, in a way, is listening to the others' language and reading with the others' eyes."
—Trinh T. Minh-Ha, *Woman, native, other*

Web links: http://www.geoff-hart.com/books/eoe/web-links.htm#ch3

If you believe that editing involves nothing more profound than correcting typographical errors and changing words or phrases to suit your personal taste or the dictates of someone's style guide, your editorial career will be short and inglorious. In reality, editing is about helping our authors to communicate clearly with their audience in a manner that makes both the author and their employer look good and that satisfies the audience that they've understood the author. We achieve this happy result when the audience understands the intended message with as little mental effort as possible; important messages may be challenging, but their *presentation* must never be. To achieve this goal, we must also communicate effectively with authors, because writing is a *human* endeavor, and most authors are both proud of what they've accomplished and deeply insecure about the quality of their writing. When we take on the role of editor, our work can easily be seen as criticism, since our role is to find errors, and doing so demonstrates the author's fallibility. Sometimes we must alter their writing dramatically to communicate successfully with readers. How can such an activity *not* damage the author's self-confidence, bruise their pride, and anger them?

The answer is to change editing from an adversarial activity, in which we become the author's nemesis and unflagging critic, into a partnership in which the author sees us as their ally in the struggle to communicate. An editor and author working together can achieve synergies that neither could achieve alone. We editors may be unable to write an original work, but are well equipped to detect flaws or gaps in the writing that authors cannot detect because they lack the necessary distance; the authors, of course, are experts in the concepts they want to communicate. As editors, we have training most writers lack in how to detect and correct flawed writing, and the desire to put those skills to work in the service of our authors. The author–editor relationship is clearly a human relationship, and editing a human interaction. To become truly effective editors, we must thus engage in mutually respectful dialogues with our authors.

In this book, I define *onscreen* editing as any editing that is done using a word processor or similar tool. It doesn't matter whether the edited text will eventually be printed or will remain forever on the computer screen. Successful onscreen editing requires more than merely altering text in a word processor. Rather, the approach must preserve and enhance the author–editor dialogue by using technology to facilitate this communication, not as an end in itself. In using this technology, we must constantly go beyond simply facilitating editorial tasks; we must also make it easier for authors to revise their manuscript in response to our suggestions.

As you begin to develop a workflow for onscreen editing and refine your editing style, remember to consider the needs of those who are upstream of you (authors and peer reviewers) and those who are downstream from you (colleagues who will review your edits, desktop publishers). Chapters 17 and 18 will help you to do so.

Word processing technology does not inherently encourage or discourage dialogue. In particular, the software provides little or no support for simultaneous revision of manuscripts by several people. This turns the dialogue into an exchange of messages, often separated by considerable time—the equivalent of collaborating on a job using handwritten letters rather than a telephone or putting our heads together over a ream of paper spread across the author's desk. Although this approach *permits* the give and take that is part of any dialogue, it does not *promote* this dialogue and cannot replace true discussion; in a discussion, the author and editor can immediately respond to each other's concerns and reach acceptable compromises. That's unfortunate, because such discussions reinforce the feeling of partnership and help authors and editors to see each other as allies rather than adversaries. For this reason, I encourage you to develop an approach in which you encourage authors to identify and discuss changes they disagree with. In this manner, you can explain your concerns (i.e., why you originally proposed a change), emphasize that other readers are likely to encounter the same problem, and propose one or more solutions; in turn, the author can explain what they were trying to say, and adapt your suggestions as required to accomplish their goal.

This is fine in theory, but authors and editors are human, and prone to all the flaws that afflict human communication. We all have annoyances, prejudices, fears, and a measure of unfamiliarity or discomfort with the unique editorial process that develops in each author–editor relationship. Ignoring these problems ensures that we'll fail as editors. An author may never learn to like us, or we may dislike an author's stylistic and other choices, and this friction will inevitably raise the level of tension. This tension makes communication more difficult, but should never prevent communication. We must remember our role: first and foremost, to help authors communicate with their audience. We do so by helping authors make effective choices, but in the end, the author has the final say. (Only in a few workplaces such as magazines do we have authority to overrule authors, and even then, we must use this power judiciously.) Our editing must be sensitive to the author's feelings, must tactfully point out and explain problems, and must suggest solutions that let the author feel their voice is appreciated and preserved. This approach helps authors to recognize the value of editing, and encourages them to work with us in a friendly, or at least professional, way.

A standard process

The overall onscreen editing process is similar to the on-paper editing process, but with a few quirks related to the computer medium. In this section, I've summarized a process used by many editors that has worked well for me for 22+ years, and that should work equally well for you after modification to suit your personal tastes and unique circumstances. Most steps in this process should be familiar to any experienced editor, but if you've been skipping a step, I recommend giving it at least one try. Each step solves an important problem, and avoiding any step may someday cause you considerable grief. The goal of the process is to ensure that you understand what is required of you, that the author shares that understanding, and that you'll be paid fairly for the work you do.

Determining your pay rate

If you're working for the same employer as your authors, you probably won't be charging them for your time. Thus, most of this section on setting fair rates of pay won't be relevant to you. However, editors in some workplaces are treated as a cost center and editing expenses are charged to the author's budget. Since the accounting methods used to determine this chargeback vary widely, you should talk to the appropriate manager at your workplace to learn the details. You may not be able to change this system, but you may gain some insights into pricing that will inform your relationship with that manager.

Editing should be a profession that brings us pleasure and intellectual satisfaction, but it must also earn us a living and should never be our sole source of joy and satisfaction. Each of our lives offers a strictly limited number of hours, and that number decreases steadily, day by day. The rate we charge for our work must compensate us adequately for spending an hour of our time on someone else's priorities rather than doing something else we'd rather be doing: spending time with a loved one, reading a good book, or traveling to distant lands. As Henry David Thoreau observed, "The cost of a thing is the amount of what I will call life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run."

On this basis, I set a standard rate for my time that is unaffected by the nature of the work: whether an author wants me to check the page numbers in a layout or rack my brain rewriting a document from scratch, an hour of my time will cost them the same amount. Other editors set different rates for proofreading, copyediting, and substantive editing. Except where this is mandated by an employer's pricing policy, and they have no bargaining power to negotiate a change, I don't understand their rationale. An hour spent on any of these activities is an hour we can no longer spend on our own priorities, and we should be compensated accordingly.

There are obvious exceptions. The most important arises when we really need the work, and are competing with other editors willing to work for less money. Then, we must choose a rate we can justify to the client because if we fail, they'll take their work elsewhere, particularly if they don't understand the value of our work and award contracts solely on the basis of price. The only good solution to this predicament involves developing an understanding of what clients are willing to pay in our part of the world or in our field and of the competition we face (i.e., what rates we'll be competing against). Organizations such as the Society for Technical Communication and local groups of editors such as the Editorial Freelancers Association in the U.S. and the Editors' Association of Canada are good places to learn this information.

If you're willing and able to do *pro bono* work, then by all means feel free to award certain clients a lower rate than you'd ordinarily accept. For example, I work with many authors in China. Given that Chinese budgets are so far below those in North America, I've chosen to accept less money for my work in exchange for the pleasure of establishing an ongoing relationship with these authors. Similarly, it may be possible to offer lower rates for work that we particularly enjoy and could never obtain if we charged our standard rate; literary editing is a good example, because this work generally pays far less than technical editing, but offers other compensations, such as the satisfaction of helping authors tell a memorable story.

How do you set a rate? The number of questions I've received on this issue suggest that the calculation is sufficiently inobvious that it requires some discussion. The most common approach involves the following steps (I've provided some basic numbers solely as examples to make the math easy):

1. Define the gross amount that you want or need to earn per year. Include the cost of your taxes, medical and other insurance, vacation pay, and a pension fund. (These expenses can amount to 30 to 50% of your base salary.)
   Example: $48 000
2. Decide how many weeks you want to work per year.
   Example: 48 weeks
3. Divide your salary by this number of weeks to estimate the income you must generate every week.
   Example: $48 000/48 weeks = $1000/week
4. Decide how many hours you want to work per week.
   Example: 20 hours (unrealistic, but let's have fun with this!)
5. Divide your weekly wage by this time to estimate your required hourly income.
   Example: $1000/20 hours = $50/hour

The result becomes the basic, non-negotiable hourly rate you require to earn your desired income. It's possible to work for less money for some clients if you can charge other clients more (or work more hours) to make up the difference.

The calculation is simple in principle, but far more complex in reality. For example, the numbers I've chosen in this example were simplistic to make the calculations easy. In particular, the notion of 20 hours of work per week assumes you can realistically generate this much paid work, and ignores the hours of paperwork and other activities (such as marketing your services) that don't directly earn any money. Moreover, the resulting rate may be well above what local clients are willing or able to pay. The important thing about this calculation process is not that the numbers are precise, but rather that it gives you an objective starting point for estimating your rate. You'll still have to subject that rate to a reality check to determine whether it's feasible.

Now let's apply a similar process to the task of bidding on a job. If we're fortunate, our client trusts us enough to simply pay an hourly rate on the assumption that we won't abuse this privilege. I work with many of my clients on this basis, but a growing number have begun to ask for fixed-price bids both so that they can budget for my services and so that they can cap the amount they'll have to pay. To provide a fixed estimate that will earn the desired hourly rate, we must learn to estimate how long a job will take and thus, how much to charge for the work. To succeed, we must be able to estimate both our productivity and the amount of work we'll be required to do. Once you know (for example) how many words you can edit per hour, and the number of words in the job, it's easy to calculate a cost for the job.

For example, let's assume that we can charge the $50/hour we just calculated, can edit 1000 words per hour (including all time spent in hand-holding and record-keeping), and have been offered a 10 000-word job. The calculation becomes the following:

- 10 000 words divided by 1000 words/hour = 10 hours
- 10 hours @ $50/hour = $500
- To this amount, add any additional expenses you'll incur: travel, postage, telephone calls, library research… whatever!

The most difficult part of this calculation is determining our productivity. Although many rules of thumb exist, these rules are too general to be useful because they cover a wide range of editors and a wide range of projects. As a result, many of these numbers are actively misleading because they reflect neither our personal productivity nor how that productivity changes for different types of work. The only way to usefully estimate our productivity is to track that productivity long enough to obtain a good feel for our ability to handle a range of jobs. For example, I've been tracking my productivities (total number of words in a document, total number of hours required to edit the document, and thus, my rate in words per hour) for years, for a wide variety of clients and types of work. As a result, I have a strong idea of the full range of productivities I've been able to achieve for work ranging from near-total rewrites to quick and easy copyedits. This lets me bid on a range of projects, sight unseen, with reasonable probability of earning my desired hourly rate. There is *no* substitute for this kind of self-knowledge.

If you're just getting started, and have no productivity data on which to estimate editing times, avoid the rules of thumb related to pages per hour you'll often hear bandied about. Instead, ask to see a copy of what you must edit before you commit to a price. (This is wise even if you do have decades of productivity statistics. Authors have a remarkable ability to surprise us!) Skim through the manuscript sufficiently thoroughly that you can identify both the good and the bad parts, then edit a few pages of the bad parts to estimate how long this work will take. From this, you can calculate your worst-case productivity and predict with some confidence that the rest of the manuscript should be easier. Applying the worst-case estimates increases the likelihood that you'll still earn your desired hourly rate should the rest of the manuscript prove unexpectedly difficult. Unless you're intimately familiar with a particular client's style, and can thus predict the difficulty of the work, it's always best to expect the worst and charge accordingly.

Although we can offer a discount for work that ends up being easier than expected, I don't recommend this. If the client wants to pay us a fair rate for the job, they should agree to pay based on how long the work actually takes. If they want a fixed price, and are thus trying to place the entire risk of a cost overrun upon us, then they shouldn't expect a discount. In the long run, even with careful estimating, we'll inevitably encounter some manuscripts that take longer than expected to edit, and earning a slight bonus for jobs that are easier than expected compensates us for the inevitable, unexpectedly difficult jobs. One useful compromise I've adopted for first-time clients is a hybrid approach: I offer to work on an hourly basis, but with a maximum price established based on my worst-case productivities. If I can beat that worst-case price, I pass along the savings to the client and thereby encourage them to work with me on an hourly basis in the future.

Simple tracking: I track my own productivity simply, using Microsoft Excel. When I start and stop work, I jot down the times and use that information to calculate how long I've worked. If you need something more formal, there are many programs available to automate the process. Check the list of utility programs on the book's Web page for a list of "time tracking" programs.

Initial negotiations

When we first begin working with an author, the process should start with a clear definition of what the author expects. In particular, we must clearly define the nature of the edit. Never rely on nominally standard terms such as "copyediting", since it's only a slight exaggeration to state that every client has a different definition of what such editing involves; naïve authors often specify something as uninformative as "a light edit", whereas seasoned pros may use an idiosyncratic definition qualified by dozens of specifications and clauses. In my experience, a clear and detailed description of what we will do is far more effective than a more general definition. Consider, for example, the details of and differences between the following two descriptions:

Getting started: Although I provide some good tips on how to manage your relationships with authors, this isn't a book on actually running a business as an editor. *Getting Started as a Freelance Copyeditor*, by Katharine O'Moore-Klopf, may be just what you need. Ruth Thaler-Carter has also entered the fray with her book *Freelancing 101: Launching Your Editorial Business*.

Substantive or structural editing: heavy editing of a manuscript to ensure that both the content and the structure are logical, clear, and effective. In addition to rewriting where necessary to improve the clarity of the text, this editing ensures that the organization and flow of the text effectively communicate the intended message, and that the text and graphics work effectively together. This editing also ensures that the manuscript contains no internal contradictions and is consistent with the body of knowledge in a field. Although this may require heavy revision, no entirely new material will be written; omissions will be for the author to resolve.

Copyediting: editing for grammar, usage, spelling, punctuation, and other mechanical aspects of style. It also involves checking the *internal* consistency of these aspects and of facts *within* the manuscript, but does not include confirmation of facts, quotations, or references.

Whether or not you agree with these specific definitions, the important point is the level of detail they provide. Each definition clearly defines exactly what you will do rather than leaving it to the author's imagination.

Initial negotiations with an author should discuss other details, such as the style guide the author expects us to use and what kinds of things (e.g., formatting) we can correct without querying the author. In addition, because we'll be working on a computer, we must specify what word processor we'll use and acceptable file formats. Ideally, we'll use the same word processor as the author, thereby eliminating potential format incompatibilities. Graphics formats are particularly problematic, since graphics embedded in a word processor occasionally display incorrectly. Both these issues provide a good example of the kind of negotiation that's useful: Can we edit graphics directly in the software used to create them, or does the author want to make corrections based on our feedback? Could we review graphics in Adobe's PDF (Acrobat) format? Acrobat eliminates most display problems, but PDF files are difficult to edit; they let us add annotations and comments, but prevent substantive editing. It's often more effective if the author copies the text from figures into a word processor document that we can then edit.

Initial negotiations should also address a key brass-tacks issue: how you'll communicate with and exchange your work with the author. I'll discuss this in some detail towards the end of this chapter.

Contracts are *not* optional

Occasionally, it's safe to work without a contract, such as work done for a long-term client who pays promptly and with no fuss, and whose financial stability (which we should confirm periodically) is excellent. For example, I've been working with a former employer for several years, and have full confidence that I understand their needs and that they'll pay me on time and in full. Those rare times when there's been a misunderstanding, we've worked together to resolve the problem with minor fuss and bother and no hard feelings on either side. As a result, I have never required this client to sign a binding contract. What I have done instead is clearly specify in writing or e-mail any unusual details that don't fall under our existing understanding of the nature of my work.

This is about the only situation in which we should consider working without a contract, and the archives of the Copyediting-L and Techwr-L discussion groups are full of tales of woe that could have been eliminated by means of a simple contract.

At a minimum, a contract represents a straightforward description of the entire nature of the work we will do and ensures that we make at least some effort to discuss the proposed work. The contract thus summarizes and formalizes the results of the preliminary negotiations that lead up to the start of a job, and specifically states the basis for payment. If human communication were always clear and precise, and free of subjective considerations and assumptions, such a statement might never be necessary. But given the fallibility of such communication, a written statement of intent is essential to minimize the risk of misunderstandings. The goal of creating a contract is to eliminate misunderstandings so you can work productively together, not to club a recalcitrant author into submission through deft blows with a lawyer. The fact that swarms of lawyers earn a lucrative living resolving contract disputes should be a clue that we cannot entirely eliminate this risk, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't try.

Indeed, when worse comes to worst, a contract becomes our only tool for ensuring that a difficult client treats us with respect and pays us for the work we've done. It also ensures that if the scope of the work changes, we can insist on compensation for that new work, and can specify our understanding of the expanded scope in an amendment to the contract. Most clients are neither evil nor incompetent, but some are, and these are the ones against whom we need protection. Many clients are overworked, overtired, and unfamiliar with the nature of our work. A contract educates them and thereby protects us against their misunderstandings and ensures we can meet their needs—something we can't do unless we first understand those needs.

Never begin work on a project, no matter how lucrative or how tight the deadline, until you have at least a firm statement of intent signed in writing. E-mail messages may constitute this proof, but because e-mail messages are relatively easy to forge, the jurisprudence in this area will evolve for some time. A printed and signed contract is your best bet for any large or expensive job; e-mail may be acceptable for smaller jobs. Even if you have not hired a lawyer to review the contract (a wise idea for large, expensive, or potentially risky or contentious work), a written and signed statement counts as a legally binding contract in most jurisdictions. Unfortunately, legal English is not the same English spoken by editors, and what seems to us to be clear wording may conflict with the legal definitions of certain terms or may violate local regulations designed to protect both parties. In a perfect world, we wouldn't need such protections. But then again, were it a perfect world, we editors would have to find honest work.

In an emergency (e.g., you've worked without a contract and the author refuses to pay you), you have one final protection: copyright law. Under copyright law, any rewriting of text that you have done for an author is copyrighted in your name until you receive payment for that work and transfer the copyright for your work to the author. (The original, unedited text that surrounds your edits remains copyrighted in the author's name.) If an author refuses to pay, you have a legal right to insist that they not use your writing. In some cases, sending a copy of the edited manuscript to the author's publisher with a note that you have not been paid and that use of any of your edits represents a violation of your copyright will encourage an author to pay; publishers fear the costs of a lawsuit resulting from their publication of your work without your permission. If an author is publishing their own work, as is often the case with corporate clients, a good lawyer can still obtain a court judgment that forces the client to withdraw any copies of your work from circulation, often at great expense to the publisher, and may even be able to obtain punitive damages from a sympathetic court. The downside of such a strategy is that it can earn you an undesirable reputation among potential clients, it can be expensive to pursue such legal action, and the outcome is not guaranteed. But if all else fails, don't neglect this strategy.

Initial edits

Having agreed upon the nature of the job, we can move on to our initial edit or edits. In on-paper editing, most editors insist on performing at least two passes through a document: once to correct the major problems, and a second time to correct anything we missed the first time, as well as any errors we introduced through our editing. In more demanding jobs, we may need three or more passes through the text to ensure that we're satisfied with the quality of the work. This doesn't change when we move to onscreen editing, so plan to allow time for at least those two passes. Where possible, let some time elapse before you revisit a document. For example, I try to arrange my schedule so I can do my final edit at least one day after the initial edit, since experience has shown that this gives me the necessary critical distance to approach the manuscript with fresh eyes and lets me spot errors I would otherwise have missed. In addition, the delay gives me time to ponder what I've read and develop a fuller understanding of the manuscript that helps me focus more intensely on communicating the right meaning.

When we've completed the initial edit, we return the manuscript to the author and cross our fingers. We may never see the document again, and once it's in the author's eager hands, we have no control over what will happen to our edits. If we're lucky, we'll get a chance for a second or even third edit (see *The final edit*, later in this chapter) to correct any errors the author introduced in response to our edits, but that's a luxury freelancers must often forego.

One key point to keep in mind at this stage: Authors will not agree with all of our edits. Sometimes this is because they simply don't understand the problem. Other times, it's because we guessed wrong and made a change that altered the meaning or that made no sense to the author. In both cases, it's important to emphasize that we're willing to work with the author to explain why a seemingly unnecessary change was necessary, or why we misunderstood the original wording badly enough to introduce an error through our edits. If *we* misunderstood something, it's clear that other readers will make the same mistake, and that's why the problem needs to be fixed, not ignored. Make sure that authors know they should never disregard a revision without clearly understanding why we made that change, and that they should feel free to discuss and resolve the problem.

Saved work and backups

Computers and the software that infests them remain unreliable tools. Both the operating system and the word processors we use as our primary tools crash unacceptably often, and the only solution is to save our work frequently. (For details on how to configure software to automatically save our work and create backup files, see *General behavior of your word processor* in Chapter 4. If your software doesn't provide comparable features, teach yourself to manually save the document every 5 to 10 minutes, or whenever you've completed a particularly difficult part of the edit.) A good rule of thumb is that you should save a document sufficiently frequently that if your system crashes, you won't mind redoing all the work you performed since the last time you saved the document.

Most important of all, whenever you finish your editing for the day, make a safe, reliable backup. This seems self-evident, but many friends and colleagues have lost large amounts of work (and potentially lost a client due to missed deadlines) because they failed to make adequate backups. What with viruses and other malware, robberies, floods, inattention due to fatigue, and other unfortunate occurrences, you'll eventually lose a computer file, and sometimes even the whole computer. The only way to prevent such disasters is to make ongoing backups of the files that you're editing. Appendix I details what you need to know to develop a successful backup strategy.

Particularly in the middle of the editing cycle, where you may exchange a file with authors several times before finalizing the manuscript, retain copies of at least the following files:

- **The original manuscript submitted by the author:** If your word processor or operating system lets you "lock" a file so that it can't be modified, this is a helpful way to protect the file, but the important thing is not to work in that original file.
- **The first version you will work on:** I find it simplest and most convenient to save a new copy of the original file as soon as I open it for the first time, and add "-e" (for "edited") to the file name as a reminder. For example, if the original is named *Geoff.doc*, the edited version becomes *Geoff-e.doc*.
- **Backups after each work session:** For example, for long and complicated edits where it may become necessary to return to a previous version and start over from that point, it's helpful to create "checkpoint" versions. Using the same names as in the previous example, I might use *Geoff-e-November 11.doc* as the version completed at the end of that day, or *Geoff-e-November 11-10 AM.doc* after a major bit of fixing up, early in the morning before the coffee has taken effect and thus, before I'm sure that I'm thinking clearly.
- **The original revised manuscript you received from the author, plus the first version you've edited:** These might be-

come *Geoff-r.doc* and *Geoff-r2.doc*,respectively. Alternatively, I may replace the "-r" (for "revised) with the date of the version.

For various reasons, Word files sometimes go missing in action. Microsoft has kindly provided a "How to recover a lost file in Word 2007 or in Word 2003" article in their knowledgebase. Most of these solutions will also work in previous versions and on the Macintosh, with minor modification.

The final edit

Ideally, we'll have a chance to see an edited manuscript after an author has incorporated our edits. This is our last chance to catch anything we missed the first time—and it's often distressing how many things we miss, particularly when we're in a hurry. It's also our chance to fix any problems the author introduced while reviewing our edits. If it's possible to do so, try to include a full final edit in the contract, and include this in the estimated cost.

When we're confident the author will communicate with us to resolve any unclear comments or to negotiate alternatives to our suggested changes, we can simply assume that the author accepted all our edits or has inserted comments to explain why not. In that case, we can read through the final version of the manuscript looking for any final errors. However, if we suspect that the author will disregard some

Ad hoc backups: Until you've developed a full-fledged backup strategy, protect your valuable files by creating an e-mail account with Google or any other online service that offers free storage space. You can now e-mail yourself a copy of each file whenever you feel the need to create a backup, whether after a couple hours of work or the end of the day.

of our changes without understanding why we proposed them or asking us to describe the problem, it may be fruitful to compare the final version of the manuscript with the original edited version to ensure that all our comments were addressed. This comparison is particularly important for manuscripts with implications for human health and safety or with legal implications. If you followed my advice in the previous section, you'll always have a copy of your edited version of the manuscript to use in this comparison. If you expect that this final edit will be necessary, be sure to include it in your plans and budget for that part of the job.

Follow-up

Once we've returned a manuscript to an author and submitted our invoice, the hard part is over. But that doesn't mean we're done yet. Editing is a human endeavor, and keeping in touch with the author is a way to maintain a friendly working relationship. The goal is to help the author understand that they're more than just an invoice to us and that we're still willing

Checking on the author: In general, it's safer if *we* implement the corrections, since it's our job to be obsessive about doing it right and we obsess better than most authors. This has an additional advantage: it lets us identify where an author thinks they've responded appropriately to a comment, but they really haven't. If the author wants to do all the implementing, comparing the document we sent them with the final document they returned will reveal errors and places where they've rejected edits that shouldn't have been rejected without discussion. Most word processors offer a "compare documents" feature that provides a quick reality check. See Chapter 6 for details.

to work with them to resolve any of the myriad small details that somehow never seem to be resolved the first time through. We should expect to be compensated for significant, ongoing work after we submit our invoice, but it's a kindness to the author and a wise investment in an ongoing relationship to answer a few follow-up questions, free of charge, while the author puts the finishing touches on their manuscript. In my experience, that kind of willingness to treat an author as something more than a supply of ready cash repays itself ten-fold in customer loyalty and free word-of-mouth advertising.

Archiving

It's wise to retain copies of edited files for some time after submitting your invoice, since it becomes necessary to return to an old manuscript surprisingly often. At least once per year, I've had to supply an author with an old copy of a file when they lost their only copy to a virus or a computer crash. In addition, we may want to see how we handled a specific editing problem or style issue for a past client, read an old manuscript that explains a difficult concept we must understand before we can tackle a new job, or simply review our own work to see the kinds of edits we do sufficiently often to justify creating macros or other shortcuts. (See Chapter 11 for details on automation.) When I first decided to work as a freelancer, my archives of old manuscripts also provided a valuable source of contact information for past clients, a useful source of references, and (with the author's permission, of course) a portfolio of my work.

Archival copies should also include all correspondence with an author during the course of our work, as well as copies of any correspondence, contracts, invoices, and other relevant information. This is useful for legal reasons, but it also preserves knowledge that may prove useful in future dealings with a client. Such records may alert us to payment difficulties, idiosyncrasies of how clients prefer to work with us, and other useful tidbits.

Of course, there's an important exception to any rule, and that exception can have important consequences for archiving. Clients sometimes ask us to either destroy all copies of our work or to protect that work so that only we will be able to see it. For example, I once worked for a client whose manuscript involved confidential material related to law enforcement and pending court cases. He therefore asked me to exclude his manuscript from my archives and delete all copies once the work was complete. (I did, but did not erase the final copies for several months, just in case; as it happens, the client required a second copy of the manuscript files later.) If you work with confidential or classified material, it may be necessary to use passwords to protect the edited files or perhaps even purchase special-purpose encryption software such as PGP to protect the information from prying eyes. If the consequences of these files falling into the wrong hands are serious, we must take correspondingly serious measures to protect ourselves and our clients.

Communication and file-exchange issues

Even if most of our work is eventually done on the computer, there are certain practical matters that can't be fully computerized. The biggest one involves communication with our authors, and in this section, I'll discuss how to handle the main issues effectively. The next-biggest problem involves how to transfer original and edited manuscripts between author and editor. If we'll be editing manuscripts on the screen, it doesn't seem to make much sense to exchange them with our authors on paper, but there are good reasons why this might sometimes be necessary. In this section, I'll also discuss several of the considerations you'll need to account for to successfully exchange files with authors.

Communication

As I've mentioned previously, the author–editor relationship should be a dialogue, not a one-way transfer of information. The purpose of dialogue is to develop a means of working effectively together—ideally in a friendly manner, but at a minimum, in a professional manner. There are several key goals that define the types of communication that must take place during this dialogue:

- **Getting to know each other:** During this phase, we begin the dialogue that initiates a relationship with the author. In addition to all the formalities (introductions and other pleasantries) that accompany any first-time conversation with someone we've never met, this initial dialogue provides an opportunity to reassure the author that they're in good hands and to build their confidence. It's also our chance to get a feel for whether we should be equally confident in the author. An author who seems disorganized or evasive sends a strong message that we should take extra care to define schedules, confirm understandings about the work, and protect ourselves (by, for example, signing a contract before beginning the work).
- **Reaching a mutual understanding:** The next step is to identify the nature of the work that will be required and explain to the author what this involves. *Never* assume that you and the author understand each other based solely on an initial discussion. *Always* summarize this discussion so the author has

a chance to confirm that you've understood their needs correctly, and offer them a chance to provide their own summary that confirms whether they've understood our needs.

- **Resolving differences of opinion:** It's rare for us to agree with an author about everything. There's a famous saying that "the client is always right—even when they're wrong", and it's important to keep that in mind. We are experts in our profession, but most of the authors we work with are experts in *their* profession, and if we're unable to persuade them that we're right by means of logic, appeals to authority (e.g., a respected style guide), or examples, it's necessary to take a long step back and recognize that it's the author's manuscript, not ours. In the end, the author has final authority, and all we can do if we disagree strongly with their choices is to insist politely but firmly that they not acknowledge our work in the manuscript.

Who's responsible? It's particularly important to ensure that authors understand their responsibility. Although we always make a good-faith effort to introduce no errors, the author is the expert, not us, and must confirm our work is correct. (Only rarely do we have the same level of expertise as the author.) When in doubt, they must learn to ask us for clarification rather than simply accepting a questionable edit and thereby introducing a preventable error into the manuscript.

- **Solving problems:** Most often, editing a manuscript is straightforward, but every now and then, problems arise. These may result from an error on our part, an unusually critical reviewer of the author's work, or a problem with a word processor file. The hardest thing for most editors to learn may be to take responsibility for our errors and strive to make things right for the author. When that's necessary, we should do that without trying too hard to absolve ourselves of blame. But when we did do everything right, and the author still blames us for a problem, we need to learn how to make things better without defending ourselves so strongly that we alienate the client. Often, the best approach is to steer the conversation to a discussion of how we can make things better rather than focusing on who to blame. (Of course, some clients should be fired when they become more trouble than they're worth. But that should always be a last resort, when all else has failed.) Some authors simply need to vent steam and get over their stress, and providing a quiet and sympathetic sounding board is sometimes all that's necessary to get past the problem.

- **Arranging payment:** When we first negotiate a contract, one of the terms should always be the payment date and the penalties for late payment (typically, interest charges or other fees). To avoid being forced to invoke those penalties, we should remind clients of the payment deadlines on our invoice, and send a polite reminder if we haven't been paid before the deadline. If the deadline passes, we're within our legal rights to insist on payment of any penalty fees, and I've done this with government departments that had no excuse other than incompetence for late payment. For other clients, it may be wiser to accept a slightly late payment without insisting on our rights; the penalty fee may not be large, and is unlikely to be large enough to make it worth the risk of alienating the client and losing their future business. Try to get what is owed and to avoid letting clients take advantage of you, but think carefully about how hard you can insist without endangering your relationship.

- **"Relationship management":** Because some clients may only need our services infrequently (e.g., when we only edit a client's annual report), it's important to keep in touch so they know we still exist. At a minimum, send out "season's greetings" and New Year's wishes in December, and never use specific greetings such as "Merry Christmas" unless you know the client's religion. If you know of any other important holidays your client may observe, such as the Chinese new year or Indian Diwali festival, send out appropriate greetings for that holiday too—ideally in the client's native language if you can learn the correct protocol. (I've researched and stored copies of Chinese, Finnish, French, Japanese, Italian, and Spanish greetings, and I'm working on expanding my repertoire.)

How often should you communicate with authors? Any of the difficulties I mentioned earlier in this section may indicate a need for immediate communication. But don't stop with the bare minimum. Always confirm that you've received any material they send you, and contact them within a day or two if they haven't confirmed they received something you sent them. With e-mail, there are no guarantees that your message made it past misconfigured spam filters, antivirus software, and network-based e-mail filters. Without being annoying, keep clients advised of your progress towards a deadline (provide appropriate status updates), and warn of any potential delays as far in advance as possible so you won't have to surprise them with a missed deadline; it's always better to negotiate an extension in advance than to simply return work late, with no explanation.

Think ahead, and alert your most important clients to any impending absences or busy periods. For example, whenever I know that I'll be leaving on vacation, I warn all my key clients at least a month in advance—but I tell them that I'm leaving a week earlier than my actual departure date. That way, if any work arrives at the last minute—and it always does—I have an extra week to handle it. Please note that I'm not advocating that you lie to clients; in an ideal world, I won't work right up to my departure because I really will need a few days to pack, get the pets taken care of, clean house, pay bills, stock the fridge for my return, and so on. Similarly, if I receive enough advance warning to know I'll be buried with work at a particular time, I'll warn my clients that I'm unlikely to be available. This lets them adjust their schedules to send me work before or after that busy period with the minimum possible disruption. It may also have the salutary effect of reminding clients that you exist and that they should send you more work.

How to communicate with authors is a bit of a judgment call. Each individual has their own preferences; busy people often prefer e-mail because they can answer at their leisure, nervous people often prefer a phone call because they can interact with you in real-time until you've soothed their nerves, and legalistically inclined people may prefer a fax or registered letter so they have a printed record of your conversation. No one method is inherently superior, so it's more a question of paying attention to the other person's needs and learning what kind of communication they prefer. When in doubt, ask them! It constantly amazes me how many people prefer to assume they know what a client wants and avoid asking; many end up with an unpleasant surprise when it turns out that they guessed wrong.

One final issue related to communication concerns the fact that our clients are often scattered around the world; I currently have clients and colleagues on every continent except Antarctica and in most time zones. For me, e-mail works best because my correspondents can receive their e-mail and respond at their convenience; there's never any risk of accidentally waking them with a phone call (or of being awoken myself, as has happened once or twice) in the middle of the night. However, a phone call has sometimes been necessary, and in that case, it helps to know when it's appropriate to call. An atlas lets you calculate time zones, either directly (from times marked on the map) or indirectly (each 15° of longitude is roughly equivalent to a time difference of 1 hour later if your client is east of you, and 1 hour earlier if they live to the west). The easiest way, though, is to use a resource, such as the World Time Server, that lets you enter your current date and time and learn the corresponding date and time anywhere in the world.

Security and confidentiality

At the start of this section, I noted that there are reasons why we might not exchange files with our authors by e-mail, even if we'll be working entirely on the screen to edit and revise a manuscript. The biggest reason is security, which becomes important when the material we're editing is confidential and must be protected. Unfortunately, although e-mail is highly convenient, it provides little security in its basic form. There are several other issues we need to be aware of so we can protect ourselves.

If security is important, take appropriate precautions to protect yourself against viruses and other nasty programs ("malware") that can damage the software components of your computer, harvest e-mail addresses, record your keystrokes, and sometimes even steal documents. These precautions are doubly important for editors because the worst-case scenario is that we might inadvertently transmit malware to a client after it has damaged our computer. At a minimum, every computer connected to the Internet needs at least the following basic protections:

- **Antivirus software:** Symantec's Norton Antivirus, available for both Mac and Windows, has been a reliable choice for many years, but there are many alternatives. For Windows computers, AVG has a good reputation; for the Macintosh, check out ClamXav or Intego's Virus Barrier.
- **Antispyware software:** Spybot Search and Destroy and Ad-Aware are well-respected programs for Windows, but have consistently rated poorly compared with Webroot Spysweeper. There are no comparable free utilities for the Macintosh, because no spyware has been reported for the Macintosh. However, Intego offers antispyware in its Internet Security Barrier software.
- **A software firewall to keep out intruders:** The Zonealarm software for Windows is well respected, but the Comodo software has become another good choice. Intego offers NetBarrier for Macintosh users. Both Windows and Macintosh OS X offer built-in firewalls, but the software is less sophisticated than commercial software, and you should consider both programs only as a short-term solution.

If you have a high-speed connection, it's worthwhile installing a hardware firewall for extra protection. Most commonly, this will be included in a device called a "router" that you connect between your computer and its physical connection to the Internet (such as a cable modem). Macintosh users have traditionally been safe from the vast majority of security problems, but this may change at any time with little warning. Unfortunately, we're currently in the middle of an "arms race" between the developers of ways to break into computers and those who try to defend us against such intrusions. Brian Livingston's excellent *Windows Secrets* newsletter offers a wealth of useful information on Windows security, including a regularly updated "security baseline" that reports the state of the art in protecting your computer—and your client's information.

Apart from conscious attempts to cause us harm, the most common problem we encounter involves misdirected e-mail. For example, I have two regular correspondents with very similar e-mail addresses, and because my e-mail software helpfully tries to automatically complete addresses as I type, I've occasionally sent a letter to the wrong friend. There's no foolproof way to prevent such errors, but we can take steps to reduce their frequency. The most obvious and effective is to simply pause and carefully check the e-mail address we've just typed before sending the message; if the address is at all cryptic, as many are, it's worthwhile looking up the client in our address book rather than simply assuming that we've guessed right. If your e-mail software tries to save time by completing addresses as you type, consider creating distinctive aliases (nicknames that take the place of a full address) for easily confused addresses. Another trick I've used is to keep a copy of an author's original message (containing the file they want me to edit) in my e-mail software's In Box. That way, I can simply select that message and reply to it, eliminating the need to type an address at all.

Another problem relates to the ongoing backups of data performed by the computer staff of our Internet service provider (ISP) and that of our client. These backups are generally a good thing, because they're our main protection against the occasional disasters that strike computers before messages are delivered. But if we're transmitting a confidential document that absolutely must not be read by anyone other than us and our client, those backups are a bad thing: the staff at the ISP should not have a chance to read the manuscript if they happen to be bored, unethical, or corrupt. Although it's possible for someone to intercept e-mail and files as they travel over the Internet between our ISP and that of our client, that's a low risk because we're simply not an attractive target unless we're engaged in military research, investment banking, or other high-security fields. But if we are working in those areas, our clients will provide an appropriately secure solution.

If the client does not provide or propose a solution, it may be worthwhile learning how to encrypt our documents—that is, to use utility software such as PGP to encode the document in such a way that only someone with the correct password can decrypt the document and read its contents. If that level of industrial-strength security strikes you as unnecessary, you can often achieve an adequate level of protection with nothing more complicated than a judiciously chosen password. Most word processors provide some form of password protection (in Word, for example, the Protect Document feature), but it's weak, and many free or inexpensive utilities exist for cracking these passwords. A nice compromise between that weak protection and a full-blown security system is to use a file compression utility such as StuffIt for Windows and the Macintosh that allows you to protect the compressed files with a password; one particularly nice feature of this software is that the developer provides free decompression utilities you can ask your client to install.

Secure transmission of passwords

Of course, if the goal of using a password is to protect an e-mailed file from snoops while the e-mail is in transit, it makes no sense to include the password in the same e-mail message—yet surprising numbers of people, including many Web sites I've used, follow exactly that approach. This makes about as much sense as leaving your car keys in the door lock. If security is important, you may not even want to send the password by e-mail in a subsequent message.

Passwords everywhere: If you install a router or other hardware firewall, change the default factory-installed administrator password. If you don't change this password, anyone who purchased the same model can use that password to gain access to your network. Any password can be cracked with enough effort, but there's no sense making the task easy. To choose a strong password, use at least eight characters, preferably a mixture of letters and numbers and possibly even one or more of the characters found above the number keys. Avoid words found in a dictionary or any publicly available information about you, such as your birth date. Of course, the password must also be something you'll remember. If, like me, you have trouble remembering the dozens of passwords that modern life requires, record your password somewhere safe: far from your computer, where a thief cannot easily find it.

Instead, telephone your client and communicate the password orally.

E-mail alternatives

In addition to security problems, you may encounter several limitations with e-mail:

- **File size:** Many service providers limit e-mail attachments to around 5 megabytes, though there are many exceptions. You may be able to compress larger files using software such as Stuff-It.
- **Attachment formats:** Because some viruses are transmitted in Word's .doc files and in compressed "archive" formats (particularly the .zip format used by Windows and Macintosh computers), many antivirus programs and corporate e-mail servers block these files. To get past these guardians, you may need to rename files to use innocent extensions such as .txt (shorthand for the "text" file format). However, you must then teach your client to rename the file with the correct extension (such as .zip) so that their software will be able to open it.
- **Confirmation of receipt:** Although we can sometimes request automatic confirmation that our message arrived (such as when we and the author are using the same soft-

Files received by e-mail: Although it's tempting to double-click a file that you received in e-mail to open it, resist that temptation. Every mail program stores its attachment files in a different location, and handles changes to those files differently. Thus, when you edit and save files opened directly from your e-mail software, the changes will be saved somewhere obscure—possibly somewhere you can't easily find and recover the file that contains your changes. To be safe, always save files yourself, in a location you can remember, and work with the files in that location.

ware), more often we must rely on the author to confirm that they received the file.

If you can't resolve these kinds of problems or the security issues I discussed in the previous section, you may need to investigate alternatives to e-mail. The first and most obvious option is to use a courier service to hand-deliver a CD (protected by a hard plastic case and a padded envelope) containing the edited file. If you work near your client, you can also hand-deliver the CD. Diskettes (floppy disks) are generally a poor choice because they are fragile, and it's easy to inadvertently overwrite the files they contain—something that can't happen with a CD. There are also persistent anecdotal reports (some more credible than others) that diskettes are vulnerable to the electromagnetic fields generated by older or poorly maintained models of the X-ray scanners and other security devices—and particularly vulnerable to the metal-detector wands used at the airport. Last but not least, some newer computers (particularly laptops) have eliminated diskette drives.

You can also use FTP (file-transfer protocol) software to transfer files directly to a client. FTP is inherently more secure than e-mail, particularly if you use a variant called "secure FTP", because the full file never comes to rest on anyone else's computer during transit. (Bits and pieces of the file travel different routes through the Internet, so only a professional spy would be able to intercept and reassemble these packets.) Free or inexpensive FTP software can be obtained from reputable download sites such as TuCows and most computer magazine sites. If your client has established a secure FTP server, they can provide the necessary information on how to connect to that site and transfer the file. If you only occasionally need to take advantage of this technology, a range of free

FTP sites is available. These let you upload files to a private, secure server hosted on the company's Web site, from which your client can download it. For example, here are some alternatives that I've either used or seen recommended by credible sources:

- You can use paid software such as Apple's MobileMe service for Macintosh and Windows users, which provides both Web-based e-mail and space for file transfers.
- Mediafire claims unlimited disk storage space plus up to 100 megabytes per file. Files remain until you delete them.
- MegaUpload provides up to 250 megabytes of upload space per file (up to 2000 megabytes plus password protection with a paid subscription).
- SendThisFile offers a free service with no maximum file size, but with minimal security and only 3 days to download the file, or a paid service with full security and various business options.
- YouSendIt offers free uploads of up to 1000 megabytes via a secure channel, accessible only by those to whom you give the file's Web address. There are also paid options.

Storage durations: If you use these services to transfer files, carefully investigate how long the service stores the files on their server. If they don't automatically delete the files within a short period of time, leave yourself a note to delete the file once the client has received it. You have to place a measure of trust in the integrity of the people who operate these services, but given that their business depends on demonstrating their integrity, such services are generally a safe bet.