Chapter 2. Writing and Editing are *Human* Endeavors

Web: http://www.geoff-hart.com/books/eoe/eoe4/eoe4.html

If you believed 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, you wouldn't be reading this book. (Also, your editorial career would be short and inglorious.) In reality, editing is about helping our authors to communicate clearly with their audience in a manner that makes the author (and their employer, if they're publishing on behalf of someone else) look good and that satisfies the audience that they've understood the author.

We've succeeded if the audience understands the intended message with as little effort as possible. Important messages may be challenging, but their *presentation* must be as simple as possible. To achieve this, we must also communicate effectively with authors, because writing is a *human* endeavor, and most authors are both proud of their accomplishment and insecure about its quality. When we edit, our work is easily seen as criticism, since our role is to find errors, and each correction demonstrates the author's fallibility. Sometimes we must alter writing dramatically to communicate successfully with readers. How can such an activity *not* damage the author's self-confidence, bruise their pride, and possibly even anger them?

The answer is for us 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. Editors and authors working together achieve synergies that neither could achieve alone. Even if we're not writers, we're well equipped to detect problems that authors can't detect because they lack the necessary distance from their message; as experts in the concepts they want to communicate, authors have difficulty understanding what it's like not to share that expertise. As editors, we provide that essential distance. We also learn to detect and correct flawed writing, but those skills must work in the author's service. The author–editor relationship is therefore a human relationship, and editing is a human interaction. To become truly effective editors, we must engage in mutually respectful dialogues with our authors.

In this book, I define *onscreen* editing as any editing done using a word processor. It doesn't matter whether the edited text will eventually be printed or will remain forever on the computer screen. But successful onscreen

editing requires more than altering text in a word processor. Rather, the approach must preserve or enhance the author–editor dialogue by using technology to improve communication, not as an end in itself. In using this technology, we must go beyond facilitating editorial tasks; we must also make it easier for authors to respond to our suggestions.

As you begin to develop a workflow for onscreen editing and refine your editing style, remember that you're part of a larger process. Find ways to account for the needs of those who are upstream from you (authors and peer reviewers) and those who are downstream from you (colleagues who will review your edits, desktop publishers, readers). *Implementing Onscreen Editing* (see the Web page at the start of this chapter for a link) will help you to keep their needs in mind across an entire organization.

An evolving situation: The available technologies continue to change rapidly. Thus, some specific details in this chapter will be outdated by the time you read this. As in the rest of this book, I'll focus on general principles that will work in all contexts. You'll undoubtedly need to modify some of the details to account for new technological options. I'll provide updates on the book's Web site as time and opportunity permit.

Encouraging Dialogue

Word processors don't inherently encourage or discourage dialogue. However, the software provides relatively weak support for simultaneous revision of manuscripts by several people or even just by an author–editor pair. When I was the in-house editor at two large research institutes, I could sit with an author and discuss my edits until we reached consensus. Now, as a freelancer, I work with authors in other countries and time zones, which makes real-time interaction difficult. This can turn what should be an engaging dialogue into an exchange of messages, often separated by considerable time—the modern equivalent of collaborating on a manuscript using handwritten letters sent by surface mail. Although this approach *permits* the give and take that is part of any dialogue, it doesn't *encourage* this dialogue and can't replace a true discussion, in which authors and editors can immediately respond to each other's concerns.

Since I published the 3rd edition of this book, the situation has improved. Microsoft Office, Google Docs, and even DropBox now offer

Internet-based collaboration environments that let multiple people work separately or simultaneously on the same document.

Real-time, long-distance collaborations

Collaborating only when necessary: It would be a horribly inefficient use of the author's time to discuss types of editing that don't require discussion, such as applying a publisher's paragraph formats and capitalization preferences, implementing style guidelines such as lists of words to be italicized, and other basic copyediting changes. These may require the author's *review,* but not any actual discussion.

The collaboration tools I'll discuss in this section are most useful for substantive and developmental editing, in which the changes require discussion, brainstorming, comparison of alternatives, and consensus. In that context, you need a solution that lets you work on a manuscript file simultaneously with an author, using the same version of the file, while discussing what you propose to do and then doing it so that you and the author can immediately see the results. This might be the best way, for example, to develop the outline for a complex document before the author starts writing (i.e., developmental editing) or to discuss alternative ways to explain a complex concept (i.e., substantive editing). To collaborate this way, you'll need to accomplish the following:

- Choose someone to guide and focus the conversation.
- Display the manuscript so both the author and the editor can see it.
- Discuss and implement changes while you view the document.
- Display the results of these changes.
- Repeat these steps, as necessary, until all substantive issues have been resolved.

In the rest of this section, I'll discuss how you can accomplish each of these tasks. I'll also assume that you're establishing the system on your own, possibly with some assistance from a suitably geeky friend. If you're working for or with a corporation that has its own dedicated system, such as Microsoft SharePoint, you'll need to discuss how to use that system with your client or their computer staff. *Implementing Onscreen Editing* provides details on how to learn the needs of an organization's computer staff.

Guiding the discussion

As is the case in any meeting, someone should guide and facilitate (*chair*) the discussion. The chair will be responsible for ensuring that participants take turns rather than talking over each other, for keeping the review process moving forward, and (in many cases) for incorporating changes into the manuscript that's under review. This coordination role is just as important as it would be during in-person meetings, with the additional difficulty that online meetings can remove most of the social cues that guide the flow of conversations in an in-person meeting. Even when the meeting includes a video component so that participants can see each other, the interaction tends to be less fluid than in an in-person interaction due to limitations of the technology.

The chair or someone they designate starts the process by uploading the manuscript that will be reviewed to a central repository such as cloud storage (e.g., DropBox, OneDrive) or a Web site. They then send all participants an invitation to participate in the meeting that includes a link to the document (usually its Web address) and instructions on how to become part of the communication channel or channels that everyone will use to discuss the document. To avoid software incompatibilities, all participants should use the same Web browser (e.g., Firefox), the same discussion software (e.g., Google Hangouts), and the same versions of each program (e.g., Word). This will reduce the risk that participants will be distracted from the task at hand (reviewing the manuscript) by disagreements about what they see on the screen or will be prevented from participating fully in the discussion by software incompatibilities. However, in many cases these problems will be sufficiently minor to allow everyone at least some flexibility in software choices.

Controlling access to a document: It's best to avoid letting multiple individuals modify a document simultaneously. Anyone who wants to modify the document should obtain the chair's permission to proceed. This lets everyone focus on the same task, without the chaos of everyone heading in a different direction or creating conflicting edits of the same text. I'll discuss this and related issues in more detail throughout this section.

Displaying the manuscript

During the review, the manuscript will be displayed in a Web browser window (e.g., Google Docs) or in a word processor window (e.g., the

most recent versions of Microsoft Word, including Word 365). If you're discussing the manuscript by exchanging text messages that will be seen by all meeting participants, the software that supports this typed discussion will be open in a second window beside the manuscript window or a pane attached to that window. This lets participants simultaneously see the document and monitor the discussion. Each time a change is implemented, the implementer then updates the file and (if the software does not do this automatically) asks everyone to "refresh" their browser or word processor window so they can see the results of the revision.

Let's start with a crude but effective approach that will be usable in just about any situation, and that doesn't require any special software. (I'll discuss more sophisticated solutions at the end of this section.) In summary, you can simply display the manuscript as a Web page during the discussion and revision. For example, it takes about 10 minutes to set up a blog site such as WordPress.com to display all or part of a manuscript that has not yet been heavily formatted. For more complex manuscripts that require you to rigorously maintain the format, you can export the file from your word processor in HTML or XHTML format (hereafter, *Web format*) and upload the resulting file to your Web site. If you don't already have a Web site established for this purpose, a cloud service such as DropBox provides an easy place to store the document.

All modern word processors let you save (export) a file in Web format. This process translates formatting information such as paragraph styles (e.g., headings) and character styles (e.g., boldfaced words) into their Web-page equivalents. In many cases, the translation process is sufficiently thorough and accurate that you can reopen the Web page in your word processor, and then save the file in that word processor's native format to restore the original document with little or no loss of formatting. For complex documents, you'll want to test this to be sure it works well, and develop workarounds for any problems.

Once everyone receives a link to the file, they can view it during the discussion, but if they're viewing it in a Web browser, they may not be able to change the file. Allowing only one person to change the file solves several problems. First, it eliminates a common problem if you are working with a file saved in Word's .docx format: if two or more people open the same file in software that doesn't support simultaneous access (such as DropBox), the software creates a new copy of the file for each person. As a result, everyone will be looking at different versions of the file. Second, allowing only one person to modify the file maintains all the edits in a single final

file. This approach requires discussion of changes and leaves the chair or their representative free to implement them. This person then re-saves the edited file or exports it again in Web format, everyone refreshes the display (i.e., reloads the Web page), and then the chair confirms that the result is acceptable (or responds to additional requests for changes), and the discussion continues.

A more efficient way to implement this approach would use software such as Adobe's Contribute or Dreamweaver to update the document, since both programs maintain the file in Web format and this eliminates the need to repeatedly re-save or re-export the edited document. In addition, such software lets meeting participants "check out" the document; only the person who has checked out the document can modify it. When they have finished their modification, they "check in" the document again, thereby making it available once more for editing by the next person who receives permission to check out and revise the document. Depending on the software and how it's configured, it may be necessary to re-upload or re-display the file after it has been checked in.

Confirming consensus: When everyone appears to have reached consensus, the chair should ensure that everyone has achieved the same understanding. That's not different from in-person meetings, but it's such an important point that it's worth repeating.

Such an approach will remain valid for the foreseeable future because of its simplicity: the tools you use will undoubtedly change, but the overall procedure won't. The obvious disadvantage of this approach arises from its simplicity: it requires manual intervention at each step, and is far less efficient than dedicated software that does this work for you. It also places control of the manuscript in the hands of one person, so even though the other participants can propose changes, only one person can implement the changes. The delays that result from the lack of automation also cause a certain punctuated rhythm to the revision process, which can be annoying. Finally, the approach may prevent the use of some features of your word processor that aren't supported in a Web browser, such as revision tracking and the ability to display comment balloons. Chapter 11 presents several suggestions on how to cope when revision tracking isn't available.

The most efficient approach is to display the manuscript in a word processor's document window, as if everyone were sitting around the same computer, sharing the same display, and taking turns using the same key-

board to make changes. This is the model adopted by the most recent versions of Microsoft Word and Google Docs. In contrast with the homemade approach, this approach is seamless: it's little different from working in a word processor, even though the file is being viewed and possibly edited simultaneously by the author, the editor, and other participants in the review and revision process. This approach also provides revision tracking and commenting features that are integrated with the document, though (as in Google's solution) the features aren't always sophisticated.

Note that in this description, I have implicitly assumed that changes will be made during the meeting and discussed before and after they have been made. It's also possible for participants to edit the manuscript independently or sequentially, and then discuss only the changes during the meeting. If the chair sets clear guidelines for how to revise another person's changes (e.g., to insert a comment that suggests rejection of a change rather than just rejecting the change without consultation), this approach can also work well.

To see examples of how these processes work, visit the Web page for this chapter.

Efficient meetings: As in any meeting, preparation is the key. All participants should review the manuscript before the meeting and summarize their thoughts in writing. For any comments that will require much typing, the typing should be done before the meeting to avoid wasting the other participants' time. The results can then be copied and pasted into a chat (discussion) window or the document.

Discussing, implementing, and displaying changes

If several people are working on a file simultaneously, there's a significant risk of overlapping and contradictory edits if they're using software that doesn't lock files at the level of individual sentences or paragraphs to prevent simultaneous changes or if they're using software that doesn't provide real-time screen updates. Since the whole point of collaborating is to discuss the changes, someone should guide the discussion so that participants are not forced to monitor two or more changes simultaneously. The chair for the meeting should define a revision protocol that controls who has permission to make changes at any given point. Taking turns works best, since that focuses the attention of all participants on a single change.

In the context of this book, the editor is most often the person who proposed the changes that require discussion, and will generally have the most experience (thus, competence) with the collaborative editing tools. Thus, it's logical for the editor to serve as the chair. However, an author who is skilled at using the tools could also lead the discussion and implement the changes. It is, after all, their manuscript.

In terms of how to discuss the changes, there are three broad categories of options: onscreen text, voice (perhaps supplemented by video), and a hybrid approach that combines the two. In each case, the biggest problem you'll face is the same one that arises during in-person meetings: multiple participants may try to communicate simultaneously, creating babble. The problem is worse in an online collaboration because some or all participants may lack the visual and other social cues that help groups of people converse in person. (This is less serious in chat-based solutions because it's easier to *read* what people are saying than it is to pick one voice out of a crowd.) The meeting's chair should use the aforementioned revision protocol to guide the discussion in such a way that everyone has a chance to comment, uninterrupted by others. For groups that aren't accustomed to working together in this way, a "don't speak until it's your turn" rule may be appropriate, with the chair dictating the order of participation. This rule is not absolute, and can be relaxed once participants learn to participate effectively by "sharing the microphone".

Methods based on onscreen text use some form of chat (instant messaging) software. This may be integrated with the editing software you're using, or it may run separately in a second program window that sits beside the manuscript window. The choice between these methods depends largely on the editing software you've chosen and whether you're working in a corporate environment that requires the use of a specific tool. If you have the option of choosing your own chat tool, this offers the advantage of providing a wide range of options, many of which are free. You can evaluate them all until you find a tool that works well for you and the author. (See the software list on the book's Web site for some suggestions.) Built-in tools often have significant limitations compared with more mature third-party tools, but compensate by offering integration with the revision software (i.e., you only have one program to manage).

Voice discussions potentially strengthen the relationships among participants because the interaction feels less technological and more human. Voice also provides many cues and feedbacks that are unavailable in chat, particularly if you have access to some form of videoconferencing that lets

participants see each other. This approach used to require expensive corporate teleconferencing systems (which you may still find yourself using occasionally), but most computers, tablets, and smartphones now offer versions of this technology (e.g., Apple's Facetime, Microsoft's Skype). There are distractions inherent in a video-based approach that make it less than ideal. For example, participants who are watching the screen while talking appear to be avoiding the eyes of listeners, whereas looking into the camera (usually mounted on the top of a monitor or on the desk below the monitor) means that you can't simultaneously read or modify the document. Nonetheless, the technology works well once you get used to these quirks.

Chat offers several significant advantages:

- You can copy and paste text from the chat window. Thus, if a suggested revision is particularly good, you can simply copy the text into the document. If participants have written up text (e.g., suggested revisions) ahead of time, they can paste that information into the chat window at an appropriate moment, thereby eliminating the inefficiency that results from typing long texts and making everyone else wait for you to finish.
- Complex sentences or concepts are easier to examine and understand in writing. In a spoken conversation, it would be necessary to break them into smaller, more digestible chunks, which is slow.
- Chat software allows *side channels* that let participants brainstorm or request clarification privately without disrupting the primary discussion.
- Most chat software lets you save the contents of the chat window to preserve a record of the conversation. This is very useful if it becomes necessary to review the rationale for a decision days or weeks later. The record will refresh your memory of a participant's priorities or concerns. In some contexts, this record can be essential for legal reasons.
- Participants who are shy or reluctant to participate in person may take advantage of the partial anonymity provided by not having to look their colleagues in the eyes and may participate more.
- In our increasingly international and multilingual work environment, chat improves participation by those who have difficulty managing the spoken language that will be used during the meeting.
- Chat may be the only option for deaf or hearing-impaired participants.

However, chat also has some significant drawbacks:

- With participants who don't type rapidly or accurately, and participants who have not typed up their comments in advance, the discussion can take a long time.
- Chat sacrifices the social cues you can obtain from a participant's voice or face and the human contact that voice and video provide.
- As anyone who's been misunderstood in e-mail or while texting on their smartphone knows, the lack of these cues increases the frequency of misunderstandings, particularly in an adversarial situation.

Voice has several advantages over chat:

- The interaction feels more natural, and therefore reinforces collaboration and a sense of partnership.
- In high-context cultures such as Asia, Africa, and many Spanish countries, the sense of connection established by a voice conversation can be an important part of the author–editor relationship.
- Discussions move faster because they are not limited by typing speed, particularly when a skilled chair enforces the revision protocol to guide the conversation.

Voice also has several disadvantages:

- Complex changes that are described verbally can be hard to hold in one's head. Written communication provides more time to read, re-read, understand (or look things up in a dictionary or online), and respond appropriately.
- There's no text to copy and paste, so someone (ideally a fast and accurate typist) must be responsible for recording the consensus and implementing the changes.
- Unless you record the conversation, there is no permanent record of what was discussed.
- Even if the software you're using can record the conversation for subsequent review, recordings can't be skimmed or searched as efficiently as text.
- In a multinational, multilinguistic, or multicultural context, participation may be difficult for those with weak skills in the spoken language. Misunderstandings are likely, and there's a significant risk that some participants will fall behind in the discussion and become completely lost. The chair must remind speakers to slow their speech, enunciate more clearly than usual, and repeat or summarize key points.

- Dealing with these drawbacks becomes easier with practice, but particularly in the early stages of a collaboration, care and concern for the needs of one's colleagues are essential.

To compensate for the limitations of both text and voice, a hybrid approach is typically most effective. Using a voice channel or a voice plus video channel lets you take advantage of all the benefits of this familiar form of human communication, such as picking up on social cues (tone of voice, body language), and this makes it easier to strengthen the collaboration. Simultaneously, someone who has been appointed to keep the minutes can type them directly into a chat window for everyone to see, thereby creating a record of the discussion and providing text that can be copied and pasted into the manuscript. For example, the Zoom Web-based conferencing system can bring together participants who only have a phone or computer microphone and participants who have computers with or without a camera, so they can see and hear each other if they have the appropriate hardware. The software associates each participant's name with their face or with a cartoon avatar if they don't have a camera. The software provides screen-sharing so that all participants can see what's on your screen, and access control so only one person at a time can change the document that's being discussed. One cool feature is that the software automatically moves the image of whoever is currently speaking to the center of the screen; thus, if you're participating using a computer, you can tell who's speaking even if you don't recognize their voice.

Software options

Collaborative editing is increasingly being integrated with word processors and other authoring software. Unfortunately, the conceptual model that guided word processor design was derived from solitary writing, not group collaboration, so collaborative editing tools remain somewhat primitive and many feel like they've been stapled to the software. However, the integration of collaboration features is becoming more effective as the products evolve. In addition to Microsoft Word and Google Docs, there's a growing number of products that facilitate collaboration. To avoid cluttering the book with information that will become rapidly obsolete, I've moved this information onto the book's Web page. Please feel free to contribute your own suggestions.

If you don't have access to such online collaboration tools, or find them too clumsy to be efficient, then you'll have to rely on some of the communication tools that I've discussed in this chapter and later in the book. The

lack of explicit support for give and take makes your work more difficult, because discussions reinforce the feeling of partnership and help authors and editors to see each other as allies rather than adversaries. For this reason, try to develop an approach in which you encourage authors to discuss any proposed changes they don't understand or with which they disagree. In this manner, you can explain your concerns (i.e., why you originally proposed a change), remind the author 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 you can adapt your suggestions to help them accomplish that goal.

This emphasis on collaboration supported by software is fine in theory, but authors and editors are human, and vulnerable to all the flaws that afflict human communication. We all have annoyances, prejudices, fears, and a measure of unfamiliarity or discomfort with the unique aspects of 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.

We must always 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 a few workplaces give editors the 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. Chapter 6 discusses how to craft effective comments and questions, and this advice also works well for real-time discussion.

For a comprehensive discussion of this form of cooperative review, including a much broader discussion of project management tools and human management issues, read *Managing Virtual Teams: Getting the Most from Wikis, Blogs, and Other Collaborative Tools* by Kit Brown, Brenda Huettner, and Char James-Tanny. They wrote and reviewed their book collaboratively, over the Web, so they know what they're talking about.

A Standard Process

The overall onscreen editing process is similar to the traditional 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 nearly 30 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 experienced editors, but if you've been skipping a step, you should reconsider that choice. Each step solves an important problem, and skipping any step may someday cause you considerable grief. The goal of the process is to ensure that you understand what is required of you and how that differs from the author's responsibility, 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 won't be directly relevant. However, some workplaces treat editing as a cost center and charge editing expenses to the author's budget. Since the accounting methods used to determine this chargeback vary widely, 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 guide and improve your relationship with that manager and their authors.

Editing should bring 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 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's 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 life will cost them the same amount. Other editors set different rates for proofreading, copyediting, and substantive editing. Except in

cases where you have no bargaining power to negotiate rates, I don't recommend that approach.

There are, of course, exceptions. The most important is when we really need the work, or must compete with editors who are willing to work for less money. Then, we must choose a rate we can justify to the client; if we fail, they'll take their work elsewhere, particularly if they don't understand the value of our work and award contracts based solely on price. The only good solution to this predicament involves learning what clients are willing to pay in our part of the world or in our subject area and learning about 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., Editors Canada, and the Society for Editors and Proofreaders in the U.K. are good places to learn this information.

If you're willing and able to do *pro bono* work, then you can award some clients a lower rate than you'd ordinarily accept. For example, when I began working with authors in China, Chinese budgets were far below those in North America, particularly for graduate students. Because I wanted to work with these authors, I accepted less money for my work in exchange for the pleasure of establishing an ongoing relationship with them. Similarly, you may want to offer lower rates for work that you particularly enjoy and could never obtain if you charged your standard rate; literary editing is a good example, as 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 the calculation is sufficiently unobvious that it requires some discussion. The most common approach involves the following steps (illustrated with some basic numbers to make the math easy):

1. Define the gross amount 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 an employee's 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 time to estimate the income you must generate each 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

This result becomes the basic, non-negotiable hourly rate you require to earn your desired income. You can charge less for some clients if you can charge other clients more or work more hours to make up the difference.

To this rate, add enough to cover any expenses you'll incur over the course of a year: travel to meetings, postage, telephone calls, library research, money to pay for your next computer or software upgrade—whatever! If you have ongoing expenses such as office rent or Internet fees, divide those expenses by the number of hours you expect to work annually and add that to your hourly cost.

The calculation is simple in principle, but more complex in reality. For example, the numbers I chose were simplistic to facilitate the calculations. The notion of 20 hours of work per week assumes you can realistically generate this much paid work, and ignores the 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 the process 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.

Bookkeeping and accounting: One of the time-consuming tasks we all face, whether freelancer or employee, is tracking our time and expenses. Freelancers most often have to do this by themselves. The University of Alabama at Birmingham offers useful advice in the article *Accounting and Bookkeeping for Freelancers.*

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 some prefer a fixed-price bid both so they can budget for my services and so 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 jobs will take and thus, how much to charge for the work. This means 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 the time required and thus, the cost of 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

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 project types and difficulties. As a result, these numbers are at best misleading because they reflect neither our personal productivity nor how that productivity changes for the different types of work we do. The only way to usefully estimate our productivity is to track that productivity for 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 decades, for a wide variety of clients and types of work. As a result, I have a good idea of the 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 with a reasonable probability of earning my desired hourly rate. There's *no* substitute for this kind of self-knowledge.

Simple tracking: I track my productivity 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. Consult the software part of the book's Web page for a list of time-tracking programs.

If you're just getting started, and have no productivity data on which to estimate editing times, ignore the rules of thumb related to pages per hour that you'll often hear discussed. 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. Even good authors have occasional bad days.) Skim through the manuscript sufficiently thoroughly that you can identify both the good and the bad parts, then edit a few pages of the

worst parts to estimate how long this work will take. From this information, 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 earn your desired hourly rate even if the rest of the manuscript proves unexpectedly difficult. Unless you're intimately familiar with a particular client's style, and can thus predict the difficulty, it's best to expect the worst and charge accordingly.

Although we can offer discounts 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 (i.e., based on an hourly rate). If they want a fixed price, and are thus trying to place the entire risk of a cost overrun upon us, 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, and earning a slight bonus for jobs that are easier than expected compensates us for the 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 productivity for a particular type of edit. 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. Insisting on a fixed price would earn me more money in the long run, but my clients prefer this flexibility and it satisfies my sense of fairness.

Initial negotiations

Getting started: Although I provide some good tips on how to manage your relationships with authors, this is not a book on how to run a business as an editor. *Getting Started as a Freelance Copyeditor*, by Katharine O'Moore-Klopf, may be just what you need. Also see Ruth Thaler-Carter's book *Freelancing 101: Launching Your Editorial Business*.

When we first begin working with an author, we must start with a clear understanding of what the author expects. Based on this requirement, we can describe the work we propose to perform to meet those expectations. 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. A clear and detailed description of our work is far more effective. Consider, for example, the details of and differences between the following descriptions (modified based on the wording in an old version of the Editors Canada contract):

- *Substantive editing* ensures that the manuscript's content and structure are logical, clear, and effective. In addition to rewriting to improve clarity, this editing ensures that the organization and flow of the text effectively communicate the intended message, and that the text and any graphics work effectively together. This also ensures that the manuscript contains no internal contradictions and is consistent with the body of knowledge in a field. Although this editing may require heavy revision, the editor provides no entirely new material; omissions will be identified and left to the author to resolve.
- *Copyediting* focuses on grammar, usage, spelling, punctuation, and any other aspects defined in a specified style guide. It also involves checking the *internal* consistency of these aspects and of facts *within* the manuscript, but does not include external confirmation of facts, quotations, or references (e.g., via database or Web searches).

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

Initial negotiations with an author should define these and 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. If no style guide is specified, we should propose one. In addition, because we'll be working on a computer, we must specify what word processor we'll use and which file format. Ideally, we'll use the same word processor as the author, thereby eliminating potential incompatibilities, but if not, we should propose a method for identifying and solving any problems. Graphics formats can be problematic, since graphics embedded in a word processor file occasionally display incorrectly. (Authors can be remarkably creative in how they misuse graphics software.) Requesting graphics in PDF format can avoid these problems and ensure that you can see the image, but it's still useful to see the version provided in the word processor file; any display problem we detect in either of the two formats may become a printing or export problem later in the publication process, and

should be fixed immediately. If we don't receive graphics in the native format of the program used to create them, describing any changes can take a long time. It's often more effective if the author copies the text from their figures into a word processor document that we can then edit using revision tracking. Chapter 12 provides some advice on editing graphics and other non-text file types for which revision tracking isn't available.

These issues provide examples of the kinds of negotiation that may be necessary: Can we edit graphics directly in the software used to create them, or does the author want to make corrections based on written feedback? Can we review and annotate graphics in Adobe's PDF (Acrobat) format? PDF eliminates most display problems, but PDF files are difficult to edit if more than basic corrections are required; they let us add annotations and comments, but prevent really thorough substantive editing. Chapter 15 provides some suggestions for editing PDF files.

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

Project management: If you must juggle many projects or many clients, look for tools to help you predict project times and manage your projects. ClickTime's "project cost estimation: templates, tools, and more" provides some helpful insights.

Contracts are *not* optional

Occasionally, it's safe to work without a contract, such as when you're working for a long-term client who already understands how you work, who pays promptly and with no fuss, and whose financial stability (which we should verify periodically) is excellent. For example, I've been working with a former employer for 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've 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 you should consider working without a contract, and the archives of the Copyediting-L and Techwhirl

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 but comprehensive description of the work we will do, and represents the results of our discussion of that work. The contract thus summarizes and formalizes the results of the preliminary negotiations before we start work, and explicitly states the basis for calculating the cost and for payment of the invoice. 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. (Indeed, such a contract is often called a "memorandum of understanding".) 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.

Do you need a lawyer? For large and expensive jobs, or for any situation that seems likely to become adversarial, you're wise to invest in a lawyer's services to draft a formal contract. If you do mainly smaller jobs, the expense may far outweigh the income you can expect to earn. In that case, asking a lawyer to draft a standard contract you can modify and use for most of your work is a reasonable compromise.

That being said, when worse comes to worst, a contract becomes our only tool for ensuring that a difficult client treats us with respect and pays for our work. It also ensures that if the scope of the work changes, we can insist on compensation for any added 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 they're the ones we need protection against. Many more clients are overworked, exhausted, stressed, or unfamiliar with the nature of our work. A contract educates them and thereby protects us against misunderstandings and ensures that 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. Verbal discussions can constitute proof of an intended contract,

but proving what someone said isn't easy. E-mail messages also constitute proof, but because e-mail messages are relatively easy to forge, the jurisprudence in this area is likely to evolve. A printed, signed, and witnessed contract is still your best bet for any large or expensive job. Even if you haven't hired a lawyer to review the contract (a wise idea for large, complex, 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 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 all parties to a contract. In a perfect world, we wouldn't need lawyers to deal with such issues. Sadly, it's not a perfect world.

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 the 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 writing 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, threatening to send 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. (This isn't just theoretical. I've used this approach twice to force authors to pay.)

If an author is publishing their own work, as is often the case with corporate clients, a good lawyer can 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 and subsequent edits

Having agreed upon the nature of the job, we can move on to our initial 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 to ensure that we're satisfied with the quality of the work. For example, a separate pass may be required to ensure consistency among the chapters of a book. Thus, budget enough time for at least two passes. Where possible, leave some time between passes. For example, I 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 miss. 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 these passes, 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, the author will offer us a chance for a second or even third edit (see *Final edits*, later in this chapter) to correct any errors the author introduced in response to our edits, but that's a luxury freelancers must often forgo.

Authors will not agree with all of our edits. This may be because they don't understand the problem. Other times, it's because we guessed wrong and our change altered the meaning or made no sense to the author. In both cases, it's important to emphasize our willingness 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, other readers will make the same mistake, and that's why the problem must be fixed rather than ignored. When you return an edited manuscript to the author, explain that they should never reject an edit without understanding why we proposed that change, and that they should feel free to discuss and resolve the problem. Don't forget to budget for that discussion time when you estimate the cost of a job.

Saved work and backups

Computers and the software that infests them remain unreliable tools. Both operating systems and word processors crash occasionally, and the only way to avoid lost work is to save our work frequently. For details on how to configure software to automatically save your work and create backup files, see *General behavior of your word processor* in Chapter 3. If your software doesn't provide this feature, teach yourself to manually save the

document every 10 to 15 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, whenever you finish your editing for the day, make a safe, reliable backup. This seems self-evident, but many of my colleagues have lost large amounts of work (and potentially lost a client due to missed deadlines) because they failed to make such backups. What with viruses and other malware, robberies, floods, fatigue errors, and other misfortunes, you'll eventually lose a file, and sometimes even your computer. The only way to recover is to make ongoing backups of the files that you're editing. Appendix I describes how to develop a successful backup strategy.

> ***Ad hoc* backups:** Until you develop a full-fledged backup strategy, protect your files by creating an e-mail account (e.g., with Google) that offers a large amount of 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 at the end of the day.

Often, you'll exchange a file with authors several times before finalizing the manuscript. Retain copies of the following versions of the file:

- **The original manuscript the author submitted:** It's easy to modify a manuscript in ways that are difficult or impossible to undo. In that case, it's helpful to have the original available as a reference. Thus, never work in that original file. Instead, duplicate the file before you start working and add "–original version" to its name.
- **The first version you will work on:** Develop a simple system for naming the files you work with. For example, for one client, I add "-e" (for "edited") to the name of the file I'll be editing. If the original is named *Geoff–original.docx*, the edited version becomes *Geoff-e.docx*.
- **A copy at the end of each work session:** For long and complicated edits or when it may become necessary to return to a previous version and start over from that point, create dated or numbered versions. Your operating system can do this for you. For example, when I duplicate a file on my Macintosh, the name becomes *Geoff-e copy.docx*. Subsequent duplicates are automatically numbered *copy2* and so on.
- **A copy before beginning complex work:** Before I begin any series of complex corrections, particularly if I'll be doing them early in the

morning before the coffee has taken effect or late in the day when I'm tired, I make a numbered copy. If I wasn't thinking clearly, this back-up lets me start over again without having to find and undo all those changes.

- **Any revised manuscript received from the author:** Once again, I create a copy of the revised file received from the author, but this time I add "-r" (for "revised") or "–revised" to the name.

Recovering lost files: Word processor files sometimes disappear. For example, if you're tired, you might delete the wrong file or save a file in the wrong place. If you *deleted* the file, look in the Recycle Bin (Windows) or the Trash (Macintosh). If you saved the file in the wrong location, check the File menu; there's usually a Recent Files option (including one in the Windows menu or the Apple menu); this will let you reopen the misplaced file and save it in the correct location. Using the Save As option should also display the last directory you worked in, and the file may be there. You can also use your computer's "find file" utility to search for the file's name. This software usually lets you search by modification date to find all files that were changed since a given date. Microsoft provides additional suggestions in the "How to recover a lost Word Document" article in their knowledgebase.

Final edits

Ideally, we'll have a chance to see the edited manuscript after the author has finished incorporating our edits. This is our last chance to catch anything we missed the first time—and it can be 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. Thus, I try to persuade my authors to send me what they consider to be the final version of the manuscript for a last review. If you want to do this, remember to include the required time in your estimated cost.

When we're confident the author will contact us to resolve any unclear comments or to negotiate alternatives to our suggested changes, we can assume that the author accepted all our edits or inserted comments to explain why they rejected a change. In that case, we can simply read through the final version of the manuscript looking for any final errors. However, if we suspect that the author disregarded some changes without understanding why we proposed them or asking us to explain the problem,

it's fruitful to compare the final version of the manuscript with our edited version to see what they missed or chose not to change. This comparison is particularly important for manuscripts with implications for human health and safety or with legal implications. You can use a copy of your final edited version of the manuscript in this comparison. Most word processors offer a document-comparison feature that provides a quick reality check. Chapter 5 provides details of how to do this in Word. 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 makes additional corrections in response to the "final edit", additional "final edits" may be required. Budget time for them too.

Checking on the author: In general, it's safer if *we* implement the corrections, since it's our job to be obsessive about doing everything right and we obsess better than most authors. However, then someone should confirm that *we* haven't missed anything.

Follow-up

Once we've returned a manuscript to the author and submitted our invoice, the hard part is over. But that doesn't mean our work is finished. Part of making editing a human endeavor involves keeping in touch with the author to maintain a friendly, ongoing 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 to work with them to resolve any of the myriad small details that somehow never seem to be resolved the first several times we pass through a document. 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, the willingness to treat an author as something more than a supply of 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. Roughly 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 the naïve belief that they'll never need the file again after their manuscript has

been published. In addition, we may want to see how we handled a specific editing problem or style issue for a client, read an old manuscript that explains a difficult concept that 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 shortcuts. (See Chapter 10 for details on automation.) When I became 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 information should include all correspondence with an author during the course of our work, as well as copies of any 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 in how clients prefer to work with us, and other useful tidbits. This often proves to be important when we need a reminder of what we agreed to do. Keep copies of important e-mail in your e-mail software, or copy the messages into a word processor document for ease of reference. Include both copies of the information in your backups.

Of course, there's an important exception to any rule, and that exception has 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 my final copies for several months, just in case; as it happens, he required a second copy of the manuscript a few months after I sent him the final edits.) If you work with confidential or classified material, you may need to use passwords to protect the edited files or perhaps even purchase special-purpose encryption software such as AES Crypt 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.

A Note About the Cloud

Many companies offer the security of storing your files online in a nebulous place called "the cloud". Cloud-based systems store your files

on computers distributed around the globe, and the best services store files simultaneously on multiple computers, so that if one of the computers becomes unavailable, you can still access your files through the other computers. Cloud-based storage thus offers a useful and secure addition to whatever storage systems you use for your files. If anything happens to your office or your computer, your files will still be safe.

Don't rely exclusively on these services. Even the best are sometimes unavailable for planned system maintenance or due to a breakdown. Apple's iCloud and Microsoft's OneDrive have both had frequent "outages" that prevented users from reaching their files. Always store copies of your files locally (on your computer) to ensure that you can keep working if your cloud-based service becomes unavailable.

Communication and File-Exchange Issues

Even if we do most of our work on the computer, there are certain practical matters that can't be fully computerized. The biggest one involves communication with our authors, which can be trickier than you might expect. In this section, I'll discuss how to handle the main issues effectively. The next-biggest problem involves how to transfer 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 reasons why this might sometimes be necessary (e.g., contracts that require a signature in ink). In this section, I'll also discuss several of the considerations you'll need to take into account when you exchange files with authors over the Internet.

Communication

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 and mutually respectful manner. There are several key goals that define the different 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. This is particularly important for high-context cultures

such as many of those in Asia, Africa, and Spanish countries. 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 in us. 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 our 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 to confirm whether they've understood our needs.

Resolving differences of opinion

It's rare for us to agree with an author about everything. There's an old 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 publicly acknowledge our work.

Who's responsible? It's important to ensure that authors understand their role in the editorial process. Although we make a good-faith effort to introduce no errors, the author is the expert, not us, and must confirm that 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 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 many editors to learn is to take responsibility for our errors and make things right—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 try to make things better without defending ourselves so strongly that we alienate a 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 generally be a last resort.) 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, it's helpful to remind clients of your payment deadlines in your invoice, and send a polite reminder if they haven't paid before the deadline. If the deadline passes, we're within our legal rights to insist on payment of any penalty fees we specified, and I've done this with government departments that had no excuse other than incompetence for a late payment. For other clients, it's 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 to you 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 only need our services infrequently (e.g., when we only edit a client's annual report), it's important to keep in touch periodically so they know we still exist. At a minimum, send out season's greetings and New Year's wishes in late 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 the 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, Greek, 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 sent you, and contact them within a day or two if they haven't confirmed that they received something you sent them. With e-mail, there are no guarantees 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, ideally at intervals you negotiate with the author), 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.

Obtain at least two e-mail addresses: Because your main service provider may occasionally be unavailable, or may be blocked by a client's network administrator or even their country (e.g., China versus Google), it's wise to have a backup e-mail address in addition to the one you obtained from your service provider. Google and Yahoo are popular, reliable choices. Include both addresses in your e-mail signature lines, and remind clients to use your second address if they tried contacting you from the primary address and received no reply.

Think ahead, and alert your most important clients to any impending absences or busy periods. For example, I warn all my key clients of my annual vacation one to two months in advance—and warn that my availability will decrease sharply in the weeks before I leave (as clients compete for the remaining days) and after I return (when I must deal with work that accumulated while I was away). I've also learned to tell them that I'm leaving several days to 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 in which 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'll need a few days to pack, take care of the pets, clean house, pay bills, stock the fridge for my return, and so on.

Similarly, if I receive enough advance warning to know that 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 of their work or mine. It may also have the salutary effect of reminding clients that I exist; fairly often, I find that they send me more work shortly after I contact them.

How to communicate with authors is a bit of a judgment call, and 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. My daughter's generation seems to prefer text messages on their smartphones. No 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! It constantly amazes me how many people prefer to assume they know what a client wants so they can avoid the awkwardness of asking; many end up with an unpleasant surprise when it turns out they guessed wrong.

A final issue related to communication concerns the fact that our clients may be scattered around the world; I currently have clients 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 in the middle of the night (or of being awoken myself, as has happened once or twice). 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.

Pay attention to time zones! When you negotiate deadlines with a distant client, it's easy to forget they may be in a different time zone. Always learn their deadlines *in their own time zone* and carefully translate that into your own time zone.

Security and confidentiality

Earlier, 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 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 and our clients.

Security for travelers: Government officials at airports and border crossings have the right to impound and inspect your computer and any data storage media (e.g., flash drives, external hard drives) you're carrying. If your computer contains anything confidential, create a backup copy before you leave, and consider not bringing sensitive information with you when you travel. Although you can encrypt files, you don't want to fight with officials about decrypting the files.

First, 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 important for editors because the worst-case scenario is that we might inadvertently transmit such malware to a client after it has taken up residence on our computer. At a minimum, every computer connected to the Internet needs at least the following basic protections:

- **Antivirus and antimalware software:** For both Windows and Macintosh, consider Symantec's Norton Antivirus, AVG, and Bitdefender. Macintosh users are no longer as safe as we used to be, so don't neglect to install antivirus software on your Mac.
- **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 free built-in firewalls, but the software is less sophisticated than commercial software and is more likely to have been targeted by malefactors.
- **A hardware firewall:** Most high-speed Internet connections are achieved through a *router* or *cable modem* that connects your computer to your Internet service provider. If the device includes a built-in (hardware) firewall, activate it for extra protection.

Change your password! If you install a router or other hardware firewall, change the factory-installed administrator password. If you don't, anyone who purchased the same model can use that password to access your network. Any password can be cracked with enough effort, but there's no sense making this easy.

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. Be vigilant!

E-mail problems

Apart from conscious attempts to cause us harm, the most common security problem we'll encounter involves misdirected e-mail. For example, I have two regular correspondents with very similar e-mail addresses, and because my e-mail software tries to automatically complete addresses as I type, I occasionally send a letter to the wrong person. There's no foolproof way to prevent such errors, but we can reduce their frequency. The most obvious and effective way is to teach yourself to pause and carefully check the e-mail address before sending the message; if the address is cryptic, as some are, choose the address from your address book rather than relying on fallible memory. If your e-mail software helpfully completes addresses as you type, consider creating distinctive aliases (nicknames that take the place of a full address) for easily confused addresses. Another trick I use 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, thereby eliminating the need to type the address.

Another problem relates to the ongoing backups of data performed by the computer staff of our Internet service provider (ISP), as well as backups performed by staff at a client's organization. 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 document 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. We're not an attractive target unless we're engaged in military research, investment banking, or other

high-security fields. If we're working in those areas, our clients will recommend or 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 AES Crypt 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, you can use the Protect Document feature). However, 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; these programs allow 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.

In addition to the security problems associated with e-mail, you may encounter several limitations that require alternative strategies:

- **File size:** Some service providers limit e-mail attachments to 5 or 10 megabytes. You may be able to compress larger files using software such as StuffIt. Alternatively, use a secure service such as DropBox to store the file, and send the author a link to that file.

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. E-mail programs differ in where they store their attachment files and handle changes to those files differently. Thus, when you edit and save files opened directly from within your e-mail software, the changes may be saved somewhere obscure—possibly somewhere you can't easily find if you need to 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.

- **Attachment formats:** Because some viruses can be transmitted in Word's .docx files and in compressed *archive* formats (particularly the .zip format used by both Windows and Macintosh computers), some antivirus programs and corporate e-mail servers block these files. Thus, you may occasionally need to rename files to use innocent extensions

such as .txt (shorthand for the *text* file format) to get past these guardians. However, you must then teach your client to rename the file with the correct filename extension (such as .zip) so that their software will be able to open it.

- **Confirmation of receipt:** Although we can request automatic confirmation that our message arrived when we and the author both use software that supports this option, more often we must rely on the author to confirm that they received the file. I always ask my clients to confirm that they received my message, and resend the file from a different address if I don't receive confirmation within a day or two.

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. If you don't have an urgent deadline, you can use a courier service to deliver the file on a DVD protected by a hard plastic case and a padded envelope. If you work near your client, you can even hand-deliver the DVD. *Thumb drives* (also called *flash drives*) are an increasingly popular choice, though they may be too expensive to use on an ongoing basis if the client will not return them.

Diskettes (floppy disks) are generally a poor choice because they are fragile, most computers no longer include diskette drives, and it's easy to inadvertently overwrite the files they contain—something that can't happen with a DVD. 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 X-ray scanners and other security devices—and are particularly vulnerable to the metal-detector wands used at the airport.

Secure transmission of passwords

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, and some Web sites I've used, rely on that approach. If you have two e-mail accounts (as I recommended earlier) offered by different service providers, you can send the file from one address and the password from the second address. If you don't want to send the password by e-mail at all, telephone your client and communicate the password orally, send it to a client's cell phone as a text message, or even send it by fax. (Yes, faxes still exist and are in common use.)

Passwords everywhere: A strong password is at least eight characters long, and preferably a mixture of letters, numbers, and characters found above the number keys. Avoid words found in a dictionary or in 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 modern life requires, record your password somewhere safe: far from your computer, where a thief cannot easily find it, or stored in software such as 1Password.

E-mail alternatives

To avoid the abovementioned problems with e-mail, some clients provide Internet-accessible directories that let you transfer files directly to them, without being stored on your ISP's computers. A common method is to establish a *file transfer protocol* (FTP) directory. Depending on how this directory is configured, it may be possible to type its Web address (URL) into your Web browser to open the directory, and then drag and drop the file into the browser window; in other cases, you may need to download FTP software to perform the transfer. 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.)

Virtually private: Because FTP transfers pass through your ISP's computers, they can (at least in theory) be intercepted on those computers. To prevent interception, you can create a *virtual private network* connection—a secure tunnel between your computer and another computer. This makes it difficult or impossible to intercept information in transit between the two computers. Many options are available; look for a paid option, since free options have to cover their costs somehow, and it's not always clear how.

If you only occasionally need to take advantage of this technology, many free FTP sites or equivalents are available. These let you upload files to a private, secure server on the company's Web site, from which your client can download it. For example:

- Use free software (with paid options for greater storage needs) such as Apple's iCloud, Microsoft's OneDrive, and DropBox. Both are avail-

able for Mac and Windows users, and both provide ample space for file transfers.

- Mediafire provides 10 gigabytes of storage for free and up to 20 gigabytes per file with paid plans. Files remain until you delete them.
- SendThisFile offers a free service with no maximum file size, or a paid service with high security and various options for businesses.

Storage durations: If you use such services to transfer files, confirm how long the service stores files on their server. If they don't automatically delete the files, add a note on your calendar to delete the file a few days after the client receives it. You have to trust the integrity of the people who operate these services, but given that their business depends on their integrity, such services are generally a safe bet.