



The Author-Editor Relationship Explained

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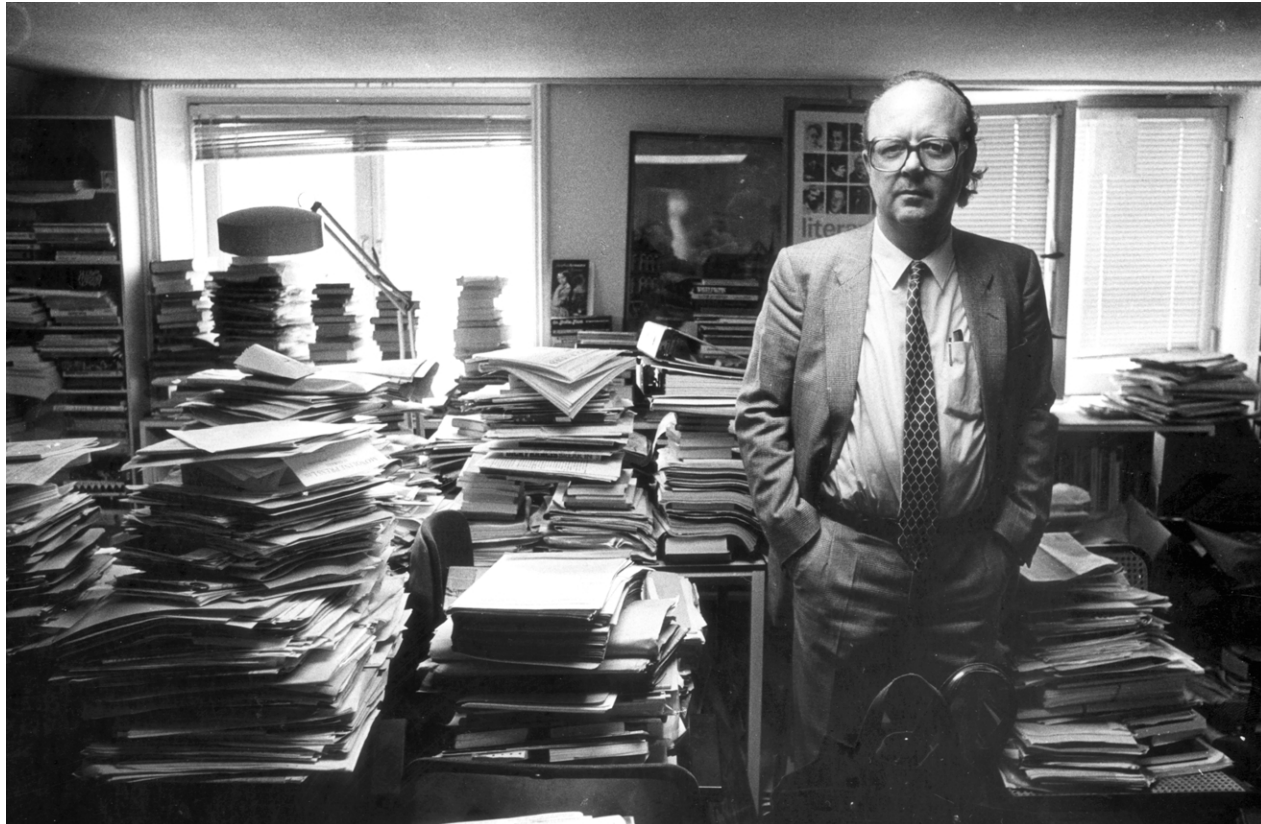
In Marie Lenstrup's introduction to this article she mentions the notion of 'the ideal interaction with an author'. The reality is that each editor, author and book are different and that prescribing an across-the-board answer to this is impossible. What I'm aiming to do in this article, though, is give an overview of how an author-editor relationship can develop, and who else might be in direct touch with an author before their book finally rolls off the printing press.

Whether you have published with the same publishing house your entire academic life or whether you have just defended your PhD and are embarking on publishing for the first time, the first person you are likely to come into contact with is a commissioning editor, also known in some publishing houses as an acquisitions editor. Each commissioning editor's job description differs from the next, but the one thing we all have in common on our job spec is the responsibility to commission new books onto our respective lists in line with whatever our company's publishing strategy might be. With this comes a whole myriad of specific tasks: researching new areas to publish in and keeping abreast of current market trends, considering speculative proposals, making decisions about commercial and academic viability, finding readers to review proposals and manuscripts, negotiating contracts, setting deadlines, answering queries from contracted authors, liaising with other in-house departments, attending conferences and university campus visiting. Add to that all the usual bits of office work that always need to be done, and you can guarantee that a commissioning editor will be a pretty busy person and very good at juggling! However, for all the pressures we might be under, and whether it is on the phone,

via email, or in the flesh, commissioning editors spend a large part of their working week speaking to their authors.

It sounds an obvious thing to say, but the secret to a successful author-editor relationship is regular communication. At any stage between signing a book contract and having the finished product hit the shops authors should not be afraid to contact their editor, no matter how minor they think their query might be, because usually the queries turn out not to be minor at all. If an author is unclear as to what a certain clause in the contract means, the editor will be able to clarify. If teaching commitments have eaten into writing time and an author is not going to be able to deliver by the agreed deadline, it is vital to alert the editor immediately so that the editor can then go back to various colleagues and let them know. Or, if the book is going to be significantly longer or shorter than the editor is expecting, the author should alert the editor right away. These are just a few examples of situations authors might find themselves in where they need to contact their editor. And of course this communication works both ways. Your editor should respond in a timely fashion to your queries or problems, although 'timely' may not mean the same day.

Between a book being contracted and actually published there are other people whose job titles end in 'editor' that an author might hear from directly. There might be a production editor, or desk editor, whose job it is to deal with the physical aspects of turning the manuscript into an actual book. There might be a copy editor, whose job it is to mark up the manuscript for typesetting and catch any last-minute typos that haven't already been spotted. There is also the marketing department who may well contact an author direct about the promotion they have planned for a title. This may all seem



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confusing, but these people all bring certain specialist knowledge to the mix that will give a book the best possible start in life. And there's a lot that the author can do to help at this stage. In terms of the production process, the first thing is to respond to the copyeditor's queries, and there probably will be some, and then turn proofs around by the deadline given. Any delays at these early stages can have dramatic effects on publication schedules.

From a more proactive point of view, authors can really work with the marketing department to enhance their plans for the promotion of their books. For instance, make sure your marketing contact is told about all the appropriate journals your department or university library subscribes to where a book review might be possible. Chances are they'll have the majority on their radar, but there so many journals out there

now that maybe some aren't known. The marketing department should also be told about any impending conferences or symposiums the author might be attending – maybe they could put together a flyer for the author to hand out or leave somewhere prominent. Or maybe they will be attending the conference themselves so a flyer could go on the book stand. Generally, informing them about any handy contacts, associations, mailing groups, all these things give the marketing department additional avenues for promotion. If there isn't a marketing person to contact, tell the commissioning editor all these things. I work for a large publishing company where we have marketing teams assigned to each individual list, but in some of the smaller presses the commissioning editor takes on not only the editorial, but also some of the production and marketing responsibilities themselves.

Throughout the whole of a book's pre-publication life, the commissioning editor is an ever-present constant who is equally as anxious to see the book appear from the printer as the author. The author-editor relationship shouldn't grind to a halt the moment the book is published, though. The hope, from an editor's point of view, is that each book will lead to the next book, or even a new edition, with a view to building up a successful list of well-established authors who have a publishing history with their particular press. As such, the editor is on hand to advise and encourage their authors to get the next book underway, as well as charting the success of books just published. When it works, there is nothing better than letting an author know that his or her book has sold out its first print run and is going on to be reprinted again and again. And if you can say this face-to-face over a glass of wine, so much the better! ■