

## New Article - Editing and the Grant Professional



By: David Lindeman, CFRE, GPC

Last month, I indulged my inner "word nerd" and attended the American Copy Editors Society annual conference—an event known for spelling bees and "spot the error" contests in addition to the usual lineup of panels and research sessions. The hundreds of editors and writers included more than a few from our circles—proposal writers, grant managers, technical writers, and others who are "wordsmiths" in our grants profession.

A common concern voiced throughout the ACES conference—and generally in the editing profession—is the perceived value of editing in today's world. With the advent of texting and other fast ways to disseminate information, some readers question whether editing is as important as it once might have been. But that could not be further from the truth. Research, tests, and studies reported at ACES confirm that readers of a well-edited document come away retaining more of its intended content—whether they realize it or not. The more errors, inconsistencies, or cumbersome language, the less a reader remembers details or finds the content credible. Often this is a subconscious process—a reader's mind may "backtrack" over an inconsistency or an awkward word, which distracts from focus on the content.

How does all this apply to our work as grant professionals? A well-edited, error-free document will enable our readers (our reviewers!) to focus on and absorb the wonderful content of our grant proposals or grant reports, rather than being consciously or subconsciously distracted by errors, inconsistencies, or awkward language.

Here are some takeaways and lessons from a conference of fussy editors—how they can apply to our work as grant professionals.

- ✓ **Plan ahead for editing.** The editing and proofreading phases of a project should be clearly set with time carved out in advance, with specific expectations. Will editing take place at various stages during the writing process or be saved for one thorough review at the end?
- ✓ **Keep a style sheet** from the beginning to maintain consistency. Will your proposal read "health based" or "health-based" throughout? This will lessen time spent fixing inconsistencies later on, and minimize the chances of such distractions for the reader or reviewer.
- ✓ **Know your audience.** Readers tend to recognize errors in areas in which they

are specialists. If your reviewers are education experts, make sure that you review and edit most closely for education-specific terminology, statistics, and other language. Readers are less worried about style rules and more concerned about professionalism and grammar.

- ✓ **Be careful about jargon**—but know that it can have its place. While we are often cautioned about jargon, in some cases it can be appropriate—depending, again, on your audience members and their expectations. A technical government agency, for example, may expect and welcome a grant proposal or report heavy on terminology.
- ✓ **Math is one of the ripest areas for errors.** Many writers and readers let their eyes glaze over numbers and percentages rather than pause to review calculations. Look closely at the statistics in your need statement and the calculations in your budget, and set the bar high for challenging anything that doesn't seem right.
- ✓ **Trust your intuition!** If a phrase or sentence seems slightly suspicious or “off” to you, it deserves closer attention. It may seem odd for copyeditors to support intuition rather than steadfast adherence to rules. But as a reader, your instincts are often spot-on. If you are not an expert in the subject matter of a statement in question, ask someone who is—even if a friend or colleague or hobbyist. They will know.
- ✓ **Pick your battles:** decide when to compromise or to stand ground. A concern about potential copyright or attribution issues is important to raise; a personal preference for using hyphens in certain words is less so as long as it is consistent. Don't sweat the small stuff; focus on professionalism, consistency, clarity, and accuracy.
- ✓ Finally, take time to explore and make use of the many **editing tools** in your word processing software. Beyond grammar- and spell-check functions, consider learning features like the “readability statistics” in Microsoft Word to track passive sentences, word and sentence length, and overall readability. You will sometimes be surprised at the average sentence length or the perceived grade level of your document!

Many say that the copyeditor is “the last editor and the first reader.” The best place you can put yourself is in the shoes of the reader—your reviewer. If you stumble across awkward language or don't understand a phrase, chances are that the reviewer will do the same. By addressing these potential concerns through careful editing before submission, you will help your reviewer focus—undistracted!—on your compelling cause and grant work.

***David Lindeman, CFRE, GPC, is a professional grantwriter and copyeditor, and serves as president of Global Grant Solutions, LLC, based in Washington, DC.***