UNIT-5 : PREPARING COPY

UNIT STRUCTURE

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5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- understand the process of copy editing
- familiarise yourself with common grammatical issues to be kept in mind while editing a copy
- learn copy editing symbols that are professionally used.

5.2 INTRODUCTION: CONTENT EDITING AND COPY EDITING

Once a reporter writes a news report or a journalist writes a news story or an article for the newspaper/magazine, the raw text or the copy needs to be checked and edited well before it can be sent to the press to be printed. This process includes editing of both the content and the final copy

The goal of content and copy editing is to ensure that content is accurate, easy to follow, fit for its purpose, and free of error, omission, inconsistency, and repetition.

5.3 STEPS OF PREPARING COPY

The process of preparing copy goes through two main steps, viz. content editing and copy editing. The role of content and copy editors is to prepare the copy so that it is ready to be sent to the press for printing.

Content editing (also called developmental editing or substantive editing), as the name implies, involves checking the content. It checks the content for factual errors, contradictions, and inconsistencies. This also includes checking if scientific abbreviations and concepts are accurately written. It checks whether the theme of the article/story has been developed (hence developmental editing) properly, or whether the sub-plots have been well integrated into the flow of the article/story. The content editor also ensures that the lead or the introduction of the article is written in a lucid language that could draw the attention of the readers. If necessary, the lead is rewritten by the content editor. In other words, content editing evaluates the content in detail. If they find any inaccuracy or inconsistency in the text, they must correct it and even consult the original writer/reporter if and when necessary.

Copy editing (sometimes written as one word – copyediting), is checking the copy for spelling, capitalization, punctuation, verb tenses and other grammatical errors. It also involves checking for continuity, sentence structure, paragraph lengths, word choices, missed words, and the like. In other words, copy editing involves correcting the language of the text. The copy editor goes through the text to ensure that the story/article makes sense throughout and is easily understood by common people. They must also confirm that the article is in adherence to the journal house style and maintain that uniformity. It is also important for them to mark the changes that they have made to the document so that the original writer can refer to it to understand what has been changed.

Content and copy editors play specific roles when it comes to checking plagiarism. As fact checkers, it becomes their responsibility to ensure that there is no plagiarism in the article/story and that it is an original piece of writing. It is also the responsibility of the content and copy editors

to check whether sources of information/facts are properly attributed and whether names of the people who are quoted in articles or news stories are correctly spelt.

In a publishing house, the raw text of an article/news story first goes to a content editor who evaluates the content, and if there is the need, suggests changes to the writer. The writer, with the help of the content editor, then re-writes the parts that need change. Once the content editor is satisfied and sure that the text will grab the attention of the reader, the manuscript goes to the copy editor. Sometimes the same person does both the content editing and the copy editing, but in either case, copyediting is the final stage before the copy goes to print.

Ideally, the tasks of content editing and copyediting are done by a specialist editor either employed by the journal, or a freelance person employed on an hourly basis. Frequently journals use technical or language editors to ensure the quality of their articles. Sometimes the Editor may be personally responsible for this.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. 1. What is the role of a copy editor?

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Q. 2. What is the role of a content editor?

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5.4 GRAMMAR USAGE AND COMMON GRAMMATICAL ERRORS

It is important for copy editors to have good knowledge of grammar and its usage, and about the commonly occurring grammatical errors found in the copy of the raw text. One must have a clear understanding of the rules of grammar and punctuation, precise meanings of words and proper spelling.

As far as the English language is concerned, it is difficult to say that the rules of grammar are absolute. However, one must be aware of what is most commonly accepted and what is not accepted in the usage of English language and grammar, particularly in case of written English, as grammar is the tool that allows a writer to communicate properly with the readers.

Use of Active Voice

One of the most important grammatical tools that copy editors must have clarity about is the usage of 'voice'- active voice and passive voice. Active and Passive voice refer to the way in which verbs are used. If a verb is used in the active voice, the emphasis is on the subject as the doer or perpetrator of the action. Passive voice throws the action onto the object and often obscures the perpetrator of the action. It is formed by putting a helping verb such as 'is' or 'was' in front of the past tense of the verb. Look at the following examples:

Active: Rahul throws the ball.
Passive: The ball is thrown by Rahul.

Active: The President sent the legislation to Congress.
Passive: The legislation was sent to Congress by the President.

Active: I picked up the glass.
Passive: The glass was picked up by me.

Generally writers for the mass media try to use the active voice rather than the passive voice. The active voice is more direct and livelier. It is less cumbersome than the passive voice and gets the reader into the action of the words more quickly. When a copy editor is editing a text, and finds that a sentence is written in the passive voice, one should ask, "Would the sentence be better if the verb were in the active voice?" In most cases, the answer is found to be an 'yes'.

However, in some cases, the answer might even be 'no'. When changing passive voice to active voice puts the wrong emphasis on the sentence, it is better to let it remain in the passive voice.

For example:
"The victims were rushed to a hospital by an ambulance." If we were to change the sentence into "An ambulance rushed the victims to a hospital." keeping in mind the rule about using active voice as much as possible, the sentence sounds as if the emphasis is laid on the ambulance and not the victims. So the use of passive voice can be occasionally justified.

Let us now take a look at a few common grammatical mistakes that are often seen in journalistic writings. Given below is an explanation of how to use these words correctly.

Who and Whom

Who is a subjective pronoun, just like **he**, **she**, **it**, **we**, and **they**. It's used when the pronoun acts as the subject of a clause. **Whom** on the other hand is an objective pronoun, like **him**, **her**, **it**, **us**, and **them**. It's used when the pronoun acts as the object of a clause. Using **who** or **whom** depends on whether you're referring to the subject or object of a sentence.

For example:

I met my teacher today, **who** is also my neighbour.

I consulted an attorney **whom** I met in New York.

They're and Their and There

They're is a contraction for 'they are', **their** refers to something owned by a group, and **there** refers to a place.

For example:

They're going to love going **there**. I heard **their f**ood is the best!

Your and You're

Your is used to refer to something being owned by **you**. On the other hand

You're is used as a contraction for 'you are'.

For example:

Can you lend me **your** book?

You're coming tonight, right?

Its and It's

The word ***it's*** is *used as a contraction* for 'it is' or in informal speech, for 'it has' The word ***its*** means 'belonging to it'. It is a possessive pronoun like ***his***. For example:

It's raining. (It is)

It's got six legs. (It has)

Hold the horse while I jump onto **its** back.

Whether and If

Many writers seem to assume that **whether** is interchangeable with **if**. It isn't. **Whether** expresses a condition where there are two or more alternatives. **If** expresses a condition where there are no alternatives. For example:

I don't know **whether** I can go to the party tonight.

I can go to the party tonight **if** you pick me up on your way.

Affect and Effect, Advice and Advise

These two sets of words are commonly mistaken because they sound and same and is assumed that they mean the same thing. However in both the above cases, one is used as a noun while the other is used as a verb. **Affect** is a verb, meaning 'to influence or produce an impression' while **effect** refers to the result or outcome of the **affect.**

Similarly, **advise** is a verb meaning 'to give counsel to; offer an opinion or suggestion as worth following' while **advice** is a noun meaning 'an opinion or recommendation offered as a guide to action, conduct, etc.'

For example:

*Use of mobile phones can **affect** children's concentration in studies. Mobile phones can also have some positive **effect** on them.*

*I need your **advice** on what I should do about my career. Can you **advise** me about how to deal with this matter*



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. 3. Fill up the blanks with the right option:

(i) She is the same person _____ I met on the train last week. (who/whom)

(ii)_____ not too late; you can still make it to the meeting. (its/it's)

(iii) I will visit you _____ it does not rain in the evening. (if/whether)

(iv) The harmful _____ of using the internet are many. (affects/ effects)

(v)_____ shirt is looking faded; please change it. (your/you're)

(vi) _____ (you're/your) going to be late _____ (if/whether) you do not hurry.

(vii) I am going _____ (there/they're) tonight to watch _____ (their/there) performance.

5.5 COPY EDITING SYMBOLS

Traditionally, in the era of journalism before the advent of the computer, copy editors needed to follow a system for marking changes to the author's text, a method for keeping track of editorial decisions, and procedures for incorporating the author's review of the copyediting into a final copy. However, over time these procedures have changed to adapt a digital on-screen space. In present times, almost all work is done on a computer system and changes can be easily marked in the word document by a 'track changes' feature. Also, if there is a digital version of a text the copyeditor is editing, they can more easily search words, run spellcheckers, and

generate clean copies of messy pages.

Traditional mark up copyediting, or hard-copy editing, is however still important. The author whose text the copyeditor is editing may prefer hard-copy mark-up, and copyeditors need to know traditional mark-up in case documents and materials cannot be exchanged electronically. When editing in hard-copy, all participating parties (the editor, author, typesetter, and proof-reader) must understand the marks the copyeditor makes, and therefore a universal marking system that signifies these changes exists.



5.6 LET US SUM UP

Let us sum up our unit on preparing copy with the following points :

- The process of preparing copy goes through two main steps, viz. content editing and copy editing. The goal of content and copy editing is to ensure that content is accurate, easy to follow, fit for its purpose, and free of error, omission, inconsistency, and repetition.
- Content editing (also called developmental editing or substantive editing), as the name implies, involves checking the content. It checks the content for factual errors, contradictions, and inconsistencies.
- Copy editing (sometimes written as one word – copyediting), is checking the copy for spelling, capitalization, punctuation, verb tenses and other grammatical errors. It also involves checking for continuity, sentence structure, paragraph lengths, word choices, missed words, and the like.
- In a publishing house, the raw text of an article/news story first goes to a content editor who evaluates the content, and if there is the need, suggests changes to the writer. The writer, with the help of the content editor, then re-writes the parts that need change. Once the content editor is satisfied and sure that the text will grab the attention of the reader, the manuscript goes to the copy editor.
- It is important for copy editors to have good knowledge of grammar and its usage, and about the commonly occurring grammatical errors found

in the copy of the raw text. One must have a clear understanding of the rules of grammar and punctuation, precise meanings of words and proper spelling.

- One of the most important grammatical tools that copy editors must have clarity about is the usage of 'voice'- active voice and passive voice. Active and Passive voice refer to the way in which verbs are used. If a verb is used in the active voice, the emphasis is on the subject as the doer or perpetrator of the action. Passive voice throws the action onto the object and often obscures the perpetrator of the action.
- Generally writers for the mass media try to use the active voice rather than the passive voice. The active voice is more direct and livelier. However, when changing passive voice to active voice puts the wrong emphasis on the sentence, it is better to let it remain in the passive voice.
- Traditionally, in the era of journalism before the advent of the computer, copy editors needed to follow a system for marking changes to the author's text. Over time these procedures have changed to adapt a digital on-screen space and changes can be easily marked in the word document by a 'track changes' feature.
- Traditional mark up copyediting, or hard-copy editing, is however still important. The author whose text the copyeditor is editing may prefer hard-copy mark-up, and copyeditors need to know traditional mark-up in case documents and materials cannot be exchanged electronically.



5.7 FURTHER READINGS

1. Berner, R. Thomas (1979). Language Skills for Journalists, Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

2. Kessler, Lauren (1989) Mastering the Message: Media Writing with Substance and Style CA: Wadsworth Pub. Co.



5.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q. No 1 : The role of a copy editor is to check the copy for spelling, capitalization, punctuation, verb tenses and other grammatical errors. It also involves checking for continuity, sentence structure, paragraph lengths, word choices, missed words, and the like. In other words, copy editing involves correcting the language of the text. The copy editor goes through the text to ensure that the story/article makes sense throughout and is easily understood by lay people. They must also confirm that the article is in adherence to the journal house style and maintain that uniformity. It is also important for them to mark the changes that they have made to the document so that the original writer can refer to it to understand what has been changed.

Ans to Q. No 2 : The role of a content editor is to check the content for factual errors, contradictions, and inconsistencies. This also includes checking if scientific abbreviations and concepts are accurately written. It checks whether the theme of the article/story has been developed (hence developmental editing) properly, or whether the sub-plots have been well integrated into the flow of the article/story. The content editor also ensures that the lead or the introduction of the article is written in a lucid language that could draw the attention of the readers. If necessary, the lead is rewritten by the content editor. In other words, content editing evaluates the content in detail. If they find any inaccuracy or inconsistency in the text, they must correct it and even consult the original writer/ reporter if and when necessary.

Ans to Q. No 3 :

(i) Whom

(ii) It's

(iii) If

(iv) Effects

(v) Your

(vi) You're, If

(vii) There, their



5.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

A. Very Short Questions

Q.1 : What do you mean by copy editing?

Q.2 : What is the role of content editor?

B. Short questions (Answer each question in about 150 words):

Q. 1. Explain the process of preparing copy for printing.

C. Long questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words):

Q.1. What are the things to be kept in mind while editing a copy?

Q. 2. Explain the difference between copy editing and content editing.