



Substantive Editing Services

What Substantive Editing Is All About

Substantive editing is a special type of editing that involves helping writers clarify and organize their writing. By far the most important skills a substantive editor brings are an understanding of the needs of the reader and an ability to ask the author questions and offer comments to help the author fill in gaps or clarify the text. A good substantive editor helps ensure the information is clear and concise, and the writing is compelling.

Substantive Editing vs. Copy Editing

Copy editing is editing strictly for grammar, spelling, punctuation, and checking for formatting consistencies, such as heading levels and so on. Copy editing is important and in our substantive editing we make many copy editing-type corrections. Substantive editing, however, goes beyond copy editing. Our editing focuses on content and structure, as well as grammar and word choice.

Our Experience

Since 1997 we've been providing substantive editing services for a myriad of clients, with special emphasis on the financial services sector, the environmental sector, and the energy conservation sector. The types of things we often edit include: guides, manuals, internal audit reports, grant proposals, research papers, government submissions, course materials, valuation reports, PowerPoint presentations, and so on.

The Substantive Editing Process

The substantive editing process is iterative, which means there's a back and forth between the author and the editor. Clients normally send us a draft for editing that they consider basically final. Though we usually edit in track changes mode (so the author can see the changes), because wording changes or changes that are necessary to ensure grammatical correctness can subtly change meaning, we usually flag such possibilities in comments. As well, if something is unclear and we are unable to recommend a change that might help make it clearer, we either speak with the author and then edit based on our conversation, or we insert a comment noting our question.

CLIENT TESTIMONIALS

"The subject matter of the report was quite technical, but Ingrid quickly understood what we were getting at and helped us by her insightful questions to take a step back and then to ultimately convey our messages in a clear and compelling manner." – Maura McCrate, Vice President and Senior Audit Manager

"We appreciated how Ingrid took the time to truly understand our business. Her questions made us think more logically about what we were trying to convey and her objectivity helped us to produce a consistent, clear final product." – Joy Williams, P.Eng., Senior Program Advisor

"Through her insight and experience, Ingrid was highly instrumental in adding clarity and a 'single voice' to documents and course materials prepared by authors with varying backgrounds, skills and writing styles." – Bea Casey, Director, CAIRP Education Programs

"I always appreciate Ingrid's edits and careful attention to words, sentence structure and meaning, as well as her attention to tables and figures to make sure they speak for themselves." – Gina Browne, Ph.D., Professor, Nursing; Clinical Epidemiology & Biostatistics, McMaster University

The Substantive Editing Process (continued)

Typically, when we return the edited document to the author there are a number of questions or comments for the author to address and the author often ends up revising the text. Depending on the extent of the revisions, the author may choose to send us a revised version for re-edit.

Editor's Profile

Ingrid Sapona is owner of Good with Words, a consulting firm specializing in clear written communication. Good with Words' motto sums up Ingrid's philosophy and mission: Clearly written ... easily understood.

Ingrid has been helping clients make complicated information clear since 1997. She has a journalism degree from Northwestern University and a law degree from Case Western Reserve University. She is a member of the New York and Ontario bars. It was while practicing law that she realized she has a special talent for making complicated, technical information understandable.

Ingrid works with professionals and business leaders, creating communications that satisfy strategic business and regulatory requirements. Using plain writing principles, she measures success by whether people understand the issue or idea the first time they read it because if they do, they're more likely to act on it.

She's a frequent speaker and lecturer on business writing. In addition, she writes a regular column called "Writer's Edge" in *The Business Valuator*, a quarterly publication of the Canadian Institute of Chartered Business Valuators, and she muses on business writing in her blog: *You don't say...*



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