

Writer's Edge

By Ingrid Sapona

Welcome to Writer's Edge — a column by Ingrid Sapona, owner of Good with Words. In her column, Ingrid will write about ways of improving your communication skills. Many of you already know Ingrid — she's been working with the CICBV and CBVs for more than ten years and is the creator and presenter of the popular seminar: *Valuation Reports and Opinions: Your Stock In Trade — Are they as clear as can be?*

The Editor's Role

By Ingrid Sapona

I'll confess — this column comes from a recent (frustrating) editing experience I had working with an author on an article for an international newsletter I edit. The author, though fluent in English, is not a native English speaker. The newsletter is published by an organization (my client) and the articles are all contributed by people who work for that organization. The newsletter is on an area of law I have familiarity with from when I practiced, but I'm not an expert in it. I'll get back to this story in a minute — but first, let's consider what editing is all about.

Copy Editing

I think most people would agree that editing involves correcting grammatical errors and punctuation and ensuring spelling and formatting is consistent throughout. An editor whose tasks are limited to this range of activities is a copy editor. (Proofreading is similar to copy editing in that a proofreader should catch obvious grammatical errors and things like typos, formatting, proper page breaks, and so on. Strictly speaking however, proofreading is done at a later stage — the stage just before something formally “goes to print” — after the text has already been copy edited.)

Substantive Editing

Substantive editing is a special type of editing that involves helping writers clarify and organize their writing. This type of editing focuses on content and structure, as well as grammar and word choice. The most important skills a substantive editor brings is 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.

The substantive editing process is iterative, which means there's a back and forth between the author and the editor. So, when I am doing substantive editing, if I don't understand something an author has written I typically insert a comment (MSWord's comment feature is a great tool for this!) asking the author to explain it a bit more to me and then I can have another go at making it clear. Often, once the author becomes aware of the confusion, they simply revise it and everyone's happy. Other times I take an educated guess at what I think the author means and I edit the text based on what I think was meant. When I do that, however, I point out in a comment that I may have inadvertently changed the meaning and if I did, I'm sorry.

The Purpose of Editing

Now, back to the story I started this column with. I edited the article (using track changes so that he could review the changes easily), making some grammatical changes and other relatively minor changes. But, I did not understand the very last sentence. So, I inserted a comment explaining that I didn't understand it and I asked him to explain to me a bit about the procedure he was referring to.

A day or so later he e-mailed me back, saying that he and a colleague had both reviewed it and it was clear as it was written, adding that a careful reader would understand it. He then added,

but I can explain the procedure to you if you like, and then he did. With this additional information I was able to fix that last sentence and we finalized the article.

As you might imagine, I didn't appreciate his snide comment about a careful reader being able to understand what he wrote. But, as an editor I've learned to graciously ignore such insults and move on knowing that the article is clearer thanks to the clarification I sought.

After finalizing the newsletter, I was thinking more about the author's response to my editing. I understand that part of his reaction was attributable to the normal pride authors have in their work. But, his insistence that it was clear as written is a sign of the fact that he doesn't appreciate the purpose of having an editor. Authors often are so close to their work they cannot be objective about whether it is clear, or what additional information a reader may need in order to fully understand.

What I should have asked the author was how he'd respond if a client said they didn't understand a point he was making. Would he simply maintain that what he said was clear? Of course not. He would add information in hopes of clearing up the confusion or try restating the idea using different words. Surely he wouldn't simply assume that it's the client's problem that the client doesn't understand what he said.

Editing is an important step in creating a document. It's more than the opportunity to fix tenses, syntax, typos, and formatting. It's the time to critically analyze it from the perspective of the audience. Whether you use a third party editor or you edit your own document, use the editing process to make sure every sentence is clear and that they all work together to help make the reader's trip toward understanding effortless.

Ingrid welcomes your feedback, questions, and suggestions for topics you'd be interested in reading about. Drop Ingrid a line at: ingrid@goodwithwords.com, or call 416-259-3399.

*Owner of Good with Words

3 Ways CBVs Can Use LinkedIn to Win New Clients

By Leslie Hughes, Punch Media

LinkedIn is the world's largest business networking site where professionals are actively investing time on their online presence and converting clients.

Fortunately, if you're afraid social media is going to be a "time suck", LinkedIn is actually the easiest of all the Social Media sites to manage. You simply have to brand yourself properly, connect with quality people and check-in a few times a week to stay in touch with your connections.

Whether you're new to LinkedIn, or you're a seasoned expert who is actively using this channel, as a Business Valuator it's important that you invest in your brand so that you and your firm dominate your niche.

Why? Because prospective clients will Google who you are before they decide to work with you and LinkedIn is one of the highest ranked sites in search.