

Just how valuable are editors?

James Matheson recently wrote an article for the website 'Digital Book World', looking at the value of editors when it comes to producing the written word. He suggests that, 'Those who devalue the work of editors ought to consider history. Perhaps the greatest single contribution of an editor to a written work can be found in *The Declaration of Independence*.

Early drafts of the most important document of the United States of America demonstrate a lot of changes in word choice in the process of writing. Thomas Jefferson had a venerable editorial committee: John Adams and Benjamin Franklin, who wrote extensive comments in the margins.

In a crucial draft of the *Declaration*, Jefferson smudged out the word **subjects** in favour of the word **citizens**. Archivists have the technology to see the change for the first time, using special spectral technology to decipher the intent of manuscript authors.

Imagine if Jefferson had used the word **subjects** rather than **citizens**. For many, it would seem that the United States was merely replacing one tyranny with another, rather than crafting a system of government "of the people, by the people and for the people." It seems plausible that this one edit changed the course of history. Not all edits have the same effect, of course. But as an IBM study suggests, their value can be measured.'

Editors are often devalued, and writers can think of them as individuals who make significant changes to their beautifully crafted work without truly understanding the intentions behind the work in the first place. They are also at times seen as a frustrating hurdle that needs to be overcome before a work can be published.

However, anyone who has been fortunate enough to use a good editor will be able to vouch for how much of a difference they have made to their manuscript, and how they have been 'saved' by a good editor. Even if an editor doesn't make huge changes to a manuscript, a great peace of mind can be found from having a second set of eyes with a different perspective on the audience read through your manuscript and give you the green light in terms of publication and writing ability.

Editors are a valuable resource and whilst it may seem as if they are just another step that has to be overcome before you can reach your ultimate goal and get that manuscript of yours published, ultimately they are a step that should not be jumped over! Editors are generally worth their weight in gold, and yes of course as with everything there will be some editors who are better than others or who suit your writing style better than others, but *generally* an editor can provide you with the following:

- Quality. Editors will remove spelling errors, grammatical errors and problems with tenses that just don't work. But they go further than this. They change sentences or entire sections to ensure that the work flows as best as possible, and they pose questions to you about the text which can help you review your own work with a more critical eye.
- Assurance. Knowing that someone else has read your manuscript and also sees its potential is a great reassurance, particularly if this is your first book.
- Value for money. Thousands of pounds can be lost because a book's worth is devalued due to silly errors in the text. Using an editor helps you avoid this risk.