
Assistant managing editor/Copy desk
The Baltimore Sun & President of ACES

EIGHT THINGS EDITORS CAN DO TO UPHOLD EDITING

- **Get control of copy flow and page flow.**

If your newsroom does not have deadlines for reporters and assigning editors as well as for the copy desk, establish some. Then enforce them. Hurried editing is not effective editing.

Set up a method to monitor page flow that will identify bottlenecks; then act on the findings. If, for example, you are making decisions about the front page late in the cycle, you are probably delaying the design of pages for multiple sections. Are there problems in coordinating photos and graphics with page design?

- **Have reporters spend time on the copy desk.**

Roy Peter Clark and Don Fry, in the second edition of *Coaching Writers*, say that this is one of the most valuable things to be done in a newsroom to improve understanding and cooperation between reporters and copy editors.

- **Make the copy desk a prerequisite for promotion.**

A reporter being considered for promotion to assigning editor should be required to do an extended hitch on the copy desk. This will develop a more thorough acquaintance with the technicalities of editing and provide valuable insight into how the paper is produced.

- **Make sure that questions get addressed.**

You are paying copy editors to identify issues and raise questions. Don't waste that money. Establish in your newsrooms a clear understanding that questions raised by copy editors are to be heard and addressed in a collegial and professional manner. Copy editors aren't demanding to prevail on every point, but they want to be heard. And remind your assigning editors and reporters that a legitimate question about a story, a photo, a graphic or a design is a legitimate question no matter who raises it.

- **Encourage in-house training.**

You don't need to bring in the out-of-town talent for all your training — you have expertise on the premises. Within the copy desk, the copy editors can set up

half-hour training sessions on various subjects at the beginning of the shift without disrupting production of the paper. One- or two-hour sessions every month for the entire staff or brown-bag-lunch discussions can be equally productive. Set aside some occasions to have open-forum discussions of whatever issues members of the staff bring to the table. The important thing is to give people opportunities to discuss their craft.

- **Promote from the copy desk.**

Reporting, writing, editing and copy editing are discrete skills. Not everyone does all of them equally well. You might be skeptical that a copy editor would be effective as an assigning editor, and you might be right. But you know from experience that not every reporter who has been named an assigning editor has functioned effectively. Don't ignore the possibility that there is untapped talent on the copy desk.

- **Listen to the people who do the work.**

Ranking editors are usually gone for the day by the time the copy desk does the bulk of its work. That means that you don't know from direct observation what is going on. So pay attention to the people who are on the spot. Make yourself available to them. Seek out their views.

- **Send copy editors to ACES events.**

We're accustomed to sending reporters and assigning editors to professional conferences and training. Send copy editors in the same proportion. (Yes, other organizations do training, too, but whose conference are you attending now?)