

A Question of Volume

Editor's Note: The Solution Corner column in this issue is based in part on postings in the CSE Forum (www.councilscienceeditors.org/services/bboard1/index.cfm). We hope readers make good use of that online resource.

A managing editor is asked to research how editing rates vary by discipline, by publisher or journal, and by level of editing. The question put to several sources is whether, for example, an average of five manuscript pages per hour or 20 pages per day for copyeditors is reasonable. What might this rate be for heavy text editing? What might it be for graphics development from text? What might it be for text and graphics development from original data (commissioned writing)?

Solutions

I find it impossible to state a daily rate for developing text from original data—there are just too many unknowns, such as the final use of the text (internal report, marketing material, short items for journal, full papers, abstracts, and so on) and the quality of the data (it makes a big difference if you have a good clinical research report to work from, compared with a pile of undigested tables). I also find that, when I am drafting material for publication, the drafting actually usually works out to be a relatively minor part of the job, especially if large numbers of authors are involved. Getting agreement from everybody (especially if the authors never meet) can often take far more time than pulling together an initial outline and draft. But, again, the nature of the end product has a big impact—a simple phase I study will take much less time than a review article or a complex study with multiple end points.

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Regarding charges for copyediting, you might want to consider establishing a rate structure based on a levels-of-edit approach. For example, a level 1 edit might be \$40 per hour, a level 2 edit \$55 per hour,

and a level 3 edit \$70 per hour. Level 3 (or deeper) can be defined to involve what others have referred to as texts that require heavy research or those written by nonnative writers of English or multiple authors. You and your clients must review the proposed levels and agree in advance on the criteria and deliverables for the chosen levels you have first defined yourself. My biggest problem in this regard has arisen not with the client but with me. When freelancing, I found it impossible to keep my plow in a shallow furrow and ignore problems in deeper (uncompensated) levels of edit.

Bob Johnson

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Standards for copyeditor production rates must inevitably depend on a journal's practices and standards. If the corrections to bring a text into compliance with a journal's style rules are automated, that may reduce the amount of time required to copyedit. On the other hand, if the journal requires an editor to check facts and to correct style errors by hand, the task takes longer. Other important variables may be the percentage of authors whose first language is not English and the amount of substantive editing expected of the copyeditor. For the Ecological Society of America (ESA), Managing Editor James Baldwin reports the following: A good copyeditor should be able to work through about 100 manuscript pages per week. Minimal expectations are for 75 manuscript pages per week. A stellar performance is 125 pages per week. ESA editors edit figures and tables, make sure that all units are in proper SI format, query authors extensively to improve clarity and ensure accurate reporting of citations, and correct style errors by hand. I would judge their copyediting standards at the high end of the spectrum among scientific journals.

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Consider charging for your product by some unit—in the case of our medical editing department, by the page because it

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continued

is more concrete than time, which can be difficult to estimate fairly to both employer and contractor. We charge by complexity of page: A page of straight text might need light editing (at lower cost) or rewrite or extended abstract development (at higher cost). A page requiring a lot of supporting documentation—title page, graphic (table or figure), or quotation source—might be charged at even higher cost. When recharge has been allowable in our not-for-profit setting, specific rates for 2004 have ranged from \$60 per microedited page to \$100 per graphic for each manuscript cycle toward publication.

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New Question: A Question of Retention

An editor of a small journal has been keeping paper copies, electronic copies, or both of manuscripts, editorial correspondence, page proofs, and other items related to the journal. Now, after several years, her file cabinets and electronic files are bulging. She thinks some streamlining might be in order. How should she proceed?