Anusha & Dhenuka Productions
presents
Julie & Julia
A writer-editor jugalbandi

Writers vs. Editors: The origins

Have you ever worked with an editor or a peer reviewer?

Sometimes it's more like having a root canal with a dull red pencil.

They can't make you change anything. You are the author. It is your baby.

If you put nine editors in a room with one monkey and asked them to make suggestions about your manuscript, you would have ten totally different opinions (and the one from the monkey might make the most sense—no offense to editors. Monkeys are just notoriously intuitive.)

Applied Research

SUMMARY

- Presents the results of a survey of 449 authors about their preferences and conceptions of the editing process
- Reports their experience with the editing process; their conceptualization of the process; their preferences about phrasing of comments and editorial mode; and their likeliness to accept suggestions

Examining Editing in the Workplace from the Author's Point of View: Results of an Online Survey

ANGELA EATON, PAMELA ESTES BREWER, TIFFANY CRAFT PORTEWIG, AND CYNTHIA R. DAVIDSON

INTRODUCTION

Editing is significant to technical communicators. In 2004, a study of STC members by Dayton found that approximately three quarters of the survey's 580 respondents indicated that editing others was an important job function (86–87). Additionally, the Technical Editing Special Interest Group (TE SIG) is the second-largest SIG in the Society, with 2,779 members in January 2007 (Society for Technical Communication 2007a).

Although editing is important to the field of technical communication, the literature about editing draws primarily from editors' personal experience or has been hypothesized from related theory. What is missing from this body of literature is the author's point of view. In this article, we report the results of an online survey of authors' preferences in editing—data collected directly from authors.

This project began with a discussion in a graduate Technical Editing course about the *Technical communication* article, "The technical editor as diplomat: Linguistic strategies for balancing clarity and politeness" of Mackiewicz and Riley (2003). In the article, the authors provide an extensive list of sentences that can be used to provide editorial comments, and they rank them from most to least recommended, on the basis of linguistic theories of politeness and directness. The class, however, thought that their editing clients would not interpret the comments in the same way the authors predicted. The nonnative speakers of American English in the class personally preferred that

In a review of editing literature, we searched for areas that were uninvestigated, particularly areas where authors disagreed. We determined the following areas were most ready for investigation: unverified "common knowledge," the ways that comments should be phrased, and missing authors' opinions. An investigation of each of these areas in the literature yielded questions that guided the structure of the survey.

Unverified "common knowledge"

As we read through the literature, we looked for concepts that were presented as common knowledge yet had not been examined on a larger scale. We found three of interest: that the editorial relationship is adversarial, that constricted timelines affect whether editing was conducted or incorporated, and that the editors' position in the organizational hierarchy relates to whether their comments are accommodated or not.

The editorial relationship is adversarial. A portion of the editing literature presents the editing relationship as tense and full of dissatisfaction (Fourdrinier 1975; Mazzatenta 1975; Sartoris 1993; Gerich 1994; Collins and Lester 1997; Rude 2006). New editors can not help but be concerned when they read statements such as "A good deal has been written about the relationship between editor and writer: the psychology applied by the one, the tender ego of the other. Inevitably a writer becomes defensive about his writing" (Fourdrinier 1975, 58) or statements describing

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Although this piece is interesting, it is 16 years old and has a rather small sample size. We wonder: how often do adversarial relationships occur in editorial relationships currently? Are they commonly experienced or just commonly reported? How do current authors perceive the editing relationship, and what traits do they prefer?

We asked authors about their experiences in three questions: we asked them to characterize the editorial relationship in their own words, to rate their overall experience on a 5-point scale from all negative to all positive, and to provide examples of positive and negative editing experiences they have had.

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Results of the writer-editor relationship study

How would you characterize the working relationship between you and the editor?

We also asked respondents to characterize their relationship with the editors they work with. Overall, the relationship was characterized as positive. Of the 379 who responded to this question, 76% characterized the working relationship as good, very good, positive, or excellent. The next most recurrent response was the category of cooperative/collaborative/helpful with 25% and respectful/professional with 16%.

Contrary to the portrayal in the literature of the editor–writer relationship as adversarial, few respondents characterized the relationship as a negative one. In fact, only 3% or approximately 11 of the 379 respondents thought of the working relationship with their editor as primarily negative. Only 5% of respondents thought of the relationship as both good and bad. Table 10 lists the categories used to characterize the editor–writer relationship and the percentage of responses for each.

379

76% Good, Very Good, Positive, Excellent

25% Helpful, Collaborative, Co-operative

16% Respectful, Professional

Jugalbandi

A jugalbandi is a musical pattern—call and response—between two artists.

One artist presents a melodically and rhythmically challenging riff that is either replicated or improved upon by the other artist.

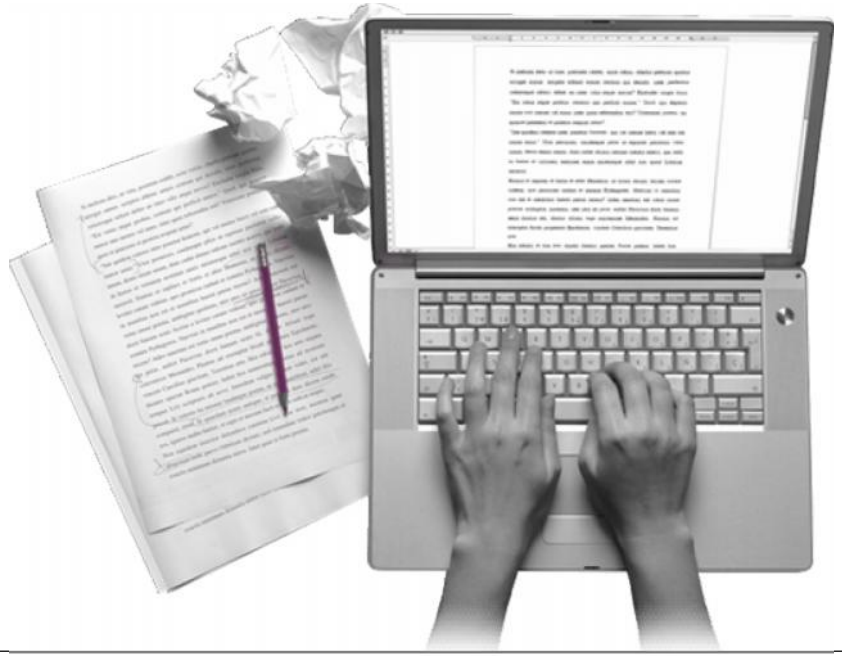
What defines a jugalbandi is that the two soloists are on an equal footing.

Meet Julie

Enter Julia

The Julie/Julia Project

112 days, 120 topics,
1 tiny conference room



Things that worked well for us

Good practices

- Work toward a common goal
- Suggest improvements without hurting each other's sentiments
- Check the facts before suggesting changes
- Respect each other's vision, voice, and time
- Keep each other informed of the issues that may arise
- Collaborate to understand the business need of the user
- Be open to rewrites, corrections, and rejections

Bon Appetit