

Will the editor or publisher rewrite your article or book?

I suppose if it's utterly unintelligible, they might—but even if only a part of it is senseless, you're far more likely to get a rejection rather than a rewrite.

Let me tell you what I do, and did, regarding rewriting since my actions seemed to be about par for what my colleagues were also doing. In other words, the devil himself speaks: I was that dreaded editor or publisher. (I've also had 1700+ articles and 42 books of my own in print, all subjected to the same indignities.)

Articles first. In the short spurts when I bought articles for magazines and newspapers, I already knew for the magazines what I could expect because the writers had sent query letters and we had given "go-aheads." (We never bought unqueried items.) We had fairly rigid expectations, and we had given the writer an approximate article length and deadline.

So it was straightforward. If the copy sent didn't do what was promised, or was half or twice as long, or arrived a leap year late, we simply rejected it, (sometimes) with regret—and wrote the errant writer's name on our no-buy list so we didn't accept their future queries. Would we play with the words we did accept? Sure, but seldom and never willy-nilly. Sometimes we'd replace a flabby noun with one more robust, or we'd tighten up the flow. Leads were where we'd most likely edit, and that often to match the title (which we provided or usually changed). The only other thing we did somewhat regularly was shorten the text to fit the available space. That usually involved pruning an example or (rarely) reducing the body from four points to three. We bounced those major changes off the author for magazine pieces.

Newspaper submissions just flew over the transom, most likely for travel, food, opinions, and letters to the editor. So we usually ran them as they were, unless they had to be condensed to fit. (Egregious words or phrases were usually replaced; unsubstantiated fact or guesswork were cut.)

A book is a different critter, and since I was usually the editor and publisher I was directly involved in the book's creation at the key stages, so we at least influenced the way a book was organized. (Most of the books victim to my interference were niche books.)

A book began with a two-page query letter asking if I (my firm) was interested... (Or I contacted the potential editor and asked him/her to submit the equivalent information, to see how they thought and wrote.) I had three relies: (1) no, sometimes delicately; (2) maybe, and this is what would make it far more acceptable, and (3) a tentative yes, on speculation until the whole book was submitted.

For the "go-aheads," we then discussed in depth the outline the author had proposed, where the contents were coming from, what examples would be used, what permissions we'd need (very few, usually), and when might I expect to see the first three chapters—and the entire book. That's usually when I named the book—title and subtitle. (Author's titles were usually painful, particularly from academics. They were also unsalable.) Once we had the title and contents, plus a bio and jpg of the author, all that was missing was a clear list of the benefits the book would bring its reader, the problems it solved or the frustrations it met, and a list of the 5-10 key words the buyer would respond to. (Since these were niche books, at this point I used that information for a **limited market pre-test** to see if the book would sell—before it was written and published. [Niche Publishing: Publish Profitably Every Time](#) explains this process.)

After that, the author would send in the first three chapters

so I could see any content or style corrections to apply to the rest of the book. Then they would submit the rest of the book.

As a dutiful book editor, I then red-penciled every word, phrase, or section and sent it back. The writer would modify, add, or rewrite, and out would pop a winner! (Before it went to print, it also got a professional proofreading by a professional proofreader. Those corrections were also made. Both the author and I, independently, skimmed the final text closely before printing. Off it went to get etched in marble ink (while in house we converted the final paperback text into an ebook for almost-instant sales.)

That's a quick reply to whether anybody dares challenge or change a writer's gilded words. I'd guess that 90% of the words remain as they are (though sometimes in different locations). And the writer has some input into the revised text, but not much. Of course, he/she can finally say no to the last draft text. I can't remember that happening because by then the new book is so much better than the original they are eager to see it out and selling!

Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett