Developmental Editing for Nonfiction (Self-Study)

Course Syllabus

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**Course Goals**

Developmental Editing for Nonfiction is an online, self-study class for editors interested in working with writers to develop their nonfiction work. If you have some experience with editing but haven’t done much in the way of developmental editing, then this is the class for you. It covers the basics of developmental editing (what it is and isn’t), the specifics of developmental editing in action, how to edit for the reader and the client, and more. The first half of the class focuses on short-length pieces. The second half focuses on book-length manuscripts.

# Note: This class does not cover the basics of getting started or building your business as a freelance editor. It is focused on the craft of editing.

**Course Requirements and Structure**

No textbook is required for this class. You will find all the needed materials in the Developmental Editing for Nonfiction class page. You will see that each of the eight lessons includes an answer key. Don’t look at the answer key until after you’ve completed the assignment. The material titled “Refresher\_Grammar and Usage” contains basic information about common sentence-level concerns. It also includes information about common legal concerns. Review this information after you’ve read the Week 1 lesson.

This class is self-paced and self-study. There is no instructor feedback, but each lesson has a before-and-after element designed to help you assess your progress.

The material is organized into eight lessons. Try to plan on completing one lesson each week so that you can make reasonable progress without forgetting anything you learned in previous lessons. Lessons take a few hours each to complete (more or less depending on how much time you have to put into them). However, you can go faster or slower. You can choose not to do particular exercises, but do be aware that the skills build on each other.

**Course Outline**

Lesson 1. Overview of developmental editor functions—what a DE is and isn’t. The focus is on understanding the qualities and characteristics of a good DE and developing a professional author-editor relationship. The lesson also discusses dealing with plagiarism and related issues.

*Exercise*: Develop effective and diplomatic querying skills.

Lesson 2. Developing your DE eye. The lesson covers specific problems common to nonfiction manuscripts, such as disorganization, lack of coherence, insufficient support for points, and uneven tone.

*Exercise*: Balance big-picture problems with sentence-level errors.

*Lesson 3*: Audience expectations. We’ll review of various types of nonfiction with the purpose of identifying the audience, understanding audience expectations, and addressing areas where the text does not meet the audience’s needs.

*Exercise*: Perform a developmental edit on a short piece in order to ensure it meets audience expectations.

Lesson 4. Understanding the purpose. This lesson focuses on how to understand an editor’s assignment letter (and determine whether the author meets the stipulations), including a review of various types of assignment letters.

*Exercise*: Perform a developmental edit on an article. Determine if it achieves its intended purpose by comparing it with its assignment letter and making specific editorial suggestions.

Lesson 5. Introduction to developmental editing for book-length projects. This lesson covers the acquisitions process as it pertains to nonfiction books, as this impact development. It also describes how to compare a final manuscript with the expectations of the publisher/client, author, and audience.

*Exercise*: Create an edit plan for a manuscript that doesn’t meet the publisher’s expectations.

Lesson 6. Common developmental problems in nonfiction. This lesson covers specific problems common to nonfiction book manuscripts, such as disorganization, privileging the wrong information, and failing to connect the dots for readers.

*Exercise*: Do a developmental edit on a book chapter, taking into consideration the common errors discussed in this lesson.

*Lesson 7*: The down and dirty. This lesson digs into the nitty gritty of developmental editing for nonfiction, covering areas such as publisher expectations versus author delivery, issues with tone, coding, and more.

*Exercise*: Perform a developmental edit that balances sentence-level concerns with bigger-picture items.

Lesson 8. Type by type. This lesson discusses the specific editing challenges that arise when working with a variety of nonfiction genres, from prescriptive self-help to cookbooks.

*Exercise*: Write a revision letter for a how-to book or a nonfiction book/manuscript of your choosing.