THE EDITORIAL PROCESS: WHAT YOUR EDITORS LOOK FOR—AND WHY

NATIONAL GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY

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No writer's work escapes the editing process at any legitimate press in any field, no matter "how big a name" the writer has. It is impossible for writers to have the same detachment and objectivity as outside readers. If authors could perceive all problems within their work, they would remove these problems to start with; and editors would not be needed. When editors don a different hat and become writers, even their work gets edited.

Every article published by the *NGS Quarterly* is edited for these points.

1. *Accuracy of facts*. Are the text, explanatory notes, and reference citations free of obvious problems? To the extent possible, facts, quotations, and citations are checked by your editors. Problems most commonly occur in the last category.

2. *Elimination of ambiguities and completeness of facts*. Do all impersonal pronouns (i.e., this, that, etc.) have clear antecedents? Is the discussion clear to the uninformed reader? This is a major problem for most writers (including editors when they do their own writing). Because authors are thoroughly familiar with their subjects it can be difficult for them to identify the details readers need.

3. *Relevancy of detail*. How necessary is each piece of information? When an essay is composed, many interesting facts could be included. However, these are often peripheral to the main subject. The criterion is: must the reader know this fact in order to understand the problem or use these records? Among genealogists, names present the greatest temptation. Since names are fundamental to genealogy, writers hate to leave out the identity of anyone involved with an event under discussion. Yet too many names confuse readers. How are readers to know which persons are so important to the subject that they must be remembered? Writers must judiciously cull names and facts, or their editors must do it for them.

4. *Organization*. Are related facts treated together? Do all subjects within a paragraph correspond to the subjects covered in the topic sentence? Is there a topic sentence? Are all paragraphs about the same length? Exceptions exist. But one-sentence paragraphs and those that typeset at only two to four lines ordinarily should be combined with the paragraph immediately preceding or following—adding a new topic sentence, if necessary, to cover the material that appears in both shorter paragraphs.

5. *Consistency*. Are facts stated in one place that later seem to be contradicted? Are all subject headings presented in parallel form? Do subheadings at the same level treat the same type of subjects? When items appear in a series, do all elements of the series have parallel grammatical structure and subject matter? Are words and terms spelled the same each time they are used? Do reference citations follow the same format throughout the essay?

6. *Repetition or redundancy*. Are the same subjects treated in more than one place? Are the same statements made more than once? Is the same word used repetitively (especially in close proximity), when a synonym would make the sentence or paragraph less monotonous? Are words or statements within a sentence redundant? (Example: "a census listing of Kalamazoo"—when a census is a listing—or Rio Grande River.)

7. *Point of view*. Is the essay presented in a chatty first-person point of view or in the third-person voice that is usually expected of objective analyses and formal discussions? Most readers don't care to hear about the writer; they want to know about the subject. Some writers do handle the first-person voice well. But more often, those who write "I did . . ." and "I think . . ." wander into personal matters that are more interesting to them than their readers.

8. *Passive and active voice*. Both are appropriate at times. Yet writing in the active voice will make sentences more concise and keep the reader moving to the next piece of action.

9. *Quotations*. Are these woven into the text in a manner that does not violate grammar and syntax? Special care is needed to be certain that the words selected for quotation are in the same voice and verb tense as the remainder of the sentence and paragraph. (This is a special problem for genealogists who quote from old documents.) Is the quote absolutely necessary in the first place, or would the sentence carry more punch if the writer put it into his or her own words?

10. *Miscellaneous points of grammar*. Are there clichés? Unnecessary capitalizations? Subject-verb disagreements? Incompatible pronouns and antecedents? Punctuation problems? Nouns used improperly as adjectives (i.e. genealogy libraries instead of genealogical libraries)? Distracting or inexplicable abbreviations? Awkward transitions from one paragraph to the next?

11. *Writing tight*. Is there unnecessary verbiage? An editor's biggest problem is space. A lackadaisical editor or a journal in need of materials is grateful for long articles, because more words fill space. If a journal is in good health, however, the amount of material submitted is more than the amount that can be accepted. Editors realize that readers expect as much material and as varied content as possible. Space, then, is at a premium. *NGS Quarterly* must use space

judiciously. Therefore, your editors must read and reread each manuscript from the standpoint of the maxim *write tight*! If something can be said in one word instead of four, or three words instead of a sentence, then the excess verbiage is culled. Manuscripts are likely to go through several rounds of tightening.

Following is a typical example.

> In spite of the fact that he moved to Ohio . . .

> Although he moved to Ohio . . .

This small change decreases word count by half. This attention to detail allows the *NGS Quarterly* to offer more varied content within its 80 pages, thereby increasing its value to the society's membership.

12. *Final thought*. As your editors (who are also writers), we view publishing an article as a cooperative effort between writer and editor. We have two interrelated objectives: to make both the writer and the society look as good in print as possible; and to present an article that will have permanent value.