



“So the writer who breeds more words than he needs, is making a chore for the reader who reads.” — Dr. Seuss

## What is a Writer's Relationship to Criticism and to the Editor?

**Summary:** This is a symposium discussion where we can think about criticism; what it's for, how it may be an asset or liability, what types of criticism are useful, and how we should respond to or apply it.

### Background

According to the dictionary:

- **Criticism:** The art of evaluating or analyzing works of art or literature.
- **Editor:** A person who is in charge of and determines the final content of a text.



### What is editing?

According to [thoughtco.com](http://thoughtco.com), “editing is a stage of the writing process in which a writer or editor strives to improve a draft (and sometimes prepare it for publication) by correcting errors and by making words and sentences clearer, more precise, and more effective.

The process of editing involves adding, deleting, and rearranging words along with recasting sentences and cutting the clutter. Tightening our writing and mending faults can turn out to be a remarkably creative activity, leading us to clarify ideas, fashion fresh images, and even radically rethink the way we approach a topic. Put another way, thoughtful editing can inspire further revision of our work.”

### There are different kinds of editing:

- **Copy editing:** The process of reviewing and correcting written material to improve accuracy, readability, and fitness for its purpose; and to ensure that it is free of error, omission, inconsistency, and repetition.
- **Proofreading:** The careful reading of a final draft to detect and correct errors and prepare the final draft for publication. The proofreader has the responsibility of ensuring there are no errors in the printed version.

- **Developmental or Creative editing:** Editing a work, possibly at a structural level, to improve its outline, content or messaging.
- **FPS editors:** Do all of the above, but are also responsible for applying each account's style or brand guidelines, as well as ensuring the content matches the client's source, messaging and expectations.

**There are four stages of writing:**

1. Prewriting
2. Drafting
3. Revising
4. Editing

**Helpful criticism:**

- Reflects back to the writer what ideas have been communicated in the piece.
- Identifies communication problems, such as ambiguous or confusing ideas, or missing information.
- Offers the critic's emotional or gut reaction so that the writer may gauge if their piece is creating the correct emotional response in the reader.
- Identifies objective errors, such as grammar or spelling, or factual errors.
- Knows the difference between objective errors and stylistic suggestions.
- Offers an alternate rephrasing of the text that is being criticized.
- Gives specifics
- Is well-supported
- Helps you publish a stronger piece than if you had not received any criticism at all!

**Unhelpful criticism:**

- Reflects the critic's personal stylistic or aesthetic preferences.
- Is vague in describing the problem.
- Is not concerned with improving the work that is published, but rather has any other goal in mind.

In short— Tell me if the engine in the car I've built runs properly and moves the vehicle; don't tell me whether you like the color I've painted it.

**Discussion questions:**

- How is editing part of the writing process? Are editors writers? Could a writer and an editor easily trade roles for a day?
- What do you think are the differences between helpful and unhelpful edits? How do you know when criticism is useful?
- Do you see your work as art, or as a product moving down the pipeline?
- Why do we sometimes react emotionally to criticism? Is it possible to still hear what may be valuable within the criticism while we are reacting emotionally to it?

- What kinds of criticism can improve our work and ourselves as writers? What kinds of criticism leads to regressive second drafts?
- What should a writer do when they receive criticism that does not seem to fully understand the text, or to understand its intent?
- What is the difference between our ego (ourselves) and our work (the product of actions taken by the ego)?
- Should a writer have a “thick skin”? Why or why not? Is there value in not having a thick skin?
- What is the nature of the writer-editor relationship?
- What is the ideal relationship between writers and editors? How can we bring that about?