

Scope of Work Scenarios

For each scenario, think about what was missing in the project proposal or negotiation that led to the mismatched expectations.

1. The Time Warp

Amir has been hired by an early-career scientist to copyedit a paper to be submitted to a journal. The paper is about 15,000 words, and the language is dense. Amir receives the manuscript on a Tuesday morning and sets to work. On Wednesday afternoon, the client emails Amir to ask why she hasn't yet received the copyedited version. She says she had talked to another editor before hiring Amir; that editor said she could copyedit about 5,000 words an hour. Amir tells his client that that speed is closer to what most editors of scientific material will manage in a day.

2. The Balloon

Raj receives a report that he is to copyedit for a social justice NGO. He had been told that it was about 27,000 words long. When he opens it, he is dismayed to see that it contains 6 pages of references and 38 long footnotes that hadn't been included in the word count (the main body of the report is just under 27K words). It also contains 12 complicated bar and line graphs (which don't figure in the word count) and 5 tables.

3. The Fuzzy Definition

Walter has been hired to copyedit a study guide for a professional certification test. The client is a small publishing firm that specializes in this type of work, subcontracting to the organization that administers the test. The client has requested a "quick and dirty" copyedit, since the budget is small and the schedule is tight. Walter accordingly does what he calls a light copyedit, focusing on correcting outright errors but paying less attention to consistency. After the manuscript has gone to the formatter, Walter gets a distraught email from the client: the formatter is finding many small inconsistencies, and the client wants them fixed.

4. The Overreach

Stephanie is hired to copyedit a scholarly monograph for a university press. She dives into the project, and finds that the text is at times unintelligible and dense. She begins to recast and rewrite sentences, although her brief is to focus on grammar and consistency with house style, and to suggest revisions for clarity only when absolutely necessary. After a couple of chapters, she

realizes that if she continues like this the project will take much longer than the schedule and budget can handle. She suggested to the managing editor that the author could take another pass to revise the text and then send it back to her to complete the copyediting. The managing editor replies that the author has no more time to work on the book, and everyone just wants to get it through production and into print.

5. The Wrong Product

Jane gets a proofreading project from a new client, a book publisher. The production coordinator sends a PDF of the page proofs. As she has done for other clients, Jane prints the PDF, marks up the printed copy by hand, and couriers the pages back to the production coordinator, with an invoice, to arrive on the specified due date. The following day, Jane gets an email from the production coordinator requesting that the changes be marked up on the PDF and returned within three days; the invoice will not be processed unless this is done.

6. The Technology Barrier

Mei has a new client, an author of historical thrillers. She has been hired to do a combined developmental and stylistic edit. She sends a Word file with tracked changes to her client, along with an editorial letter summarizing the types of changes she has suggested. Two days later, the client emails Mei, asking why she didn't make any changes in the file and whether Mei expects her to revise the file on her own based on the general comments in the letter.

7. The Phone Call

Alistair, a developmental editor, settles into his office chair to begin his first read-through of a first draft of a novel. The inexperienced author has recently taken a creative writing course and is eager to tell a story but is nervous about the editing and publishing process. Just as Alistair reaches the end of the first chapter, the phone rings. It's the author, wondering about Alistair's progress and whether he has any questions or comments so far. Alistair reassures the client that he's working on it, and after a bit of pleasant small talk, the call ends and Alistair returns to the manuscript. The next day, the client calls again to ask about the progress of the editing.