The Editor as Collaborator: Communication Makes the Difference

Lori Meyer
STC IDL / Technical Editing SIG Showcase
September 15, 2016

What we'll cover

- Why good communication is important
- Perceptions of the editor's role that can cause communication challenges
- Common communication challenges
- Guidelines for enhancing positive communication while working with authors to improve quality

Why good communication is important

- Promotes teamwork – we're all in this together.
- Helps authors be more open to your suggestions, reducing repeated errors going forward.
- Allows more focus on the value you can provide.
- Opens the door to additional editing opportunities.

Common perceptions of an editor's role

- "Angry blue pencil"
- Too focused on unimportant details
- Separate – "us" vs. "them"

Common communication challenges

- How do you respond to unclear content?
- How do you respond to missing information?
- How do you respond to major problems with organization, flow, or quality of writing?

Common communication challenges

- How do you respond to content delivered behind schedule?

- How do you respond when you are restricted to proofing or light editing when the content clearly needs more work?

Communication makes the difference

- See your edits as teamwork.
  - Focus on the document itself – as a product of the team's effort.
  - Look beyond you and the author alone.
- Get to know your team members.
- Clarify expectations regarding extent of edits.
- Describe to your author how you work and the approach you took to edit the content.

Communication makes the difference

- Note the good as well as the bad.
    - Communicates that your focus is on quality, not just catching errors.
    - Encourages authors to do more of what works.
- Offer to meet with your author one-on-one to discuss major editing issues.

Communication makes the difference

- Query with an open mind.
  - Focus on understanding, not on writing deficiencies.
  - Avoid a finger-pointing questioning style that can put your author on the defensive.
  - Consider that what does not make sense to you could be a product or UI issue. Work with your author to find the best wording solution.

Communication makes the difference

- Be mindful of how you are responding as you edit.
  - Consider the circumstances under which the draft was written – extremely tight deadline, sudden change in project scope, lack of input...all of which might have contributed to content and writing errors.
  - Look for ways to convert frustration into constructive communication.

Communication makes the difference

- Keep feedback constructive.
  - Suggest alternative wording and phrasing, and offer reasons for each suggestion.
  - If you're a writer yourself, benefit from what you've learned from reviews of your documentation.

Communication makes the difference

- Educate.
  - Offer to teach: presentations, webinars, or workshops
  - Let your authors know what resources you use.
  - Share your resource library with your team.
  - Help your authors understand your organization's styles and standards.

A final word....

- Clean and polish content without scratching!

Contact information for Lori

- Email
  meyer.communications@gmail.com
- Twitter
  @lrmeyer747