

Best Practices in Communications



Skeptical clients sometimes ask us how our editors can work on specialized technical documents given that they themselves are not experts in the subject matter. The answer boils down to a concept with which almost everyone in business is familiar: best practices. Just as, say, a product designer takes measurements and runs tests to ensure the functionality of a new widget, our editors use best practices in their chosen field—communications—to ensure that documents are readable and informative for their intended audiences.

The idea of best practices in communications encompasses a number of elements—from document formatting and presentation of information in graphics to details of grammar and usage. Although the subject matter of a document may be highly technical or specific to a particular line of business, an experienced editor knows the basic rules for optimal presentation of information and can apply them in much the same way that a programmer chooses an appropriate architecture and follows certain coding standards in developing a new software application. That is, the editor assesses the overall organization and presentation of the document and corrects the nuts and bolts of grammar, spelling, and punctuation. In addition, the editor may suggest revising certain sentences or sections for maximum readability or converting data to graphics for instant understanding and impact. Although some of these revisions may seem picky or trivial to someone outside the field of communications, they are based on the editor's accumulation of knowledge from the past and current thinking about how readers take in information.

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The good news is that most subject-matter experts who find themselves cast in the role of writer don't have to worry about the grammatical details. You can make the editor's job easier by following certain guidelines (see Editech's "Quick Look-up Guide to the 12 Most Confusing Words and Rules in Business Communications"), but in general, your task is to transfer the knowledge you possess into a format that someone else can access to fine-tune the details. In other words, let the editor sweat the small stuff.

And in many cases, temporary editors are the perfect choice to break a sweat over your document. A contract editor can work on site or off to guide your rough draft to the review stage or to polish a document before final publication. The temporary editor has both knowledge of best practices in communications and the ability to focus all of his or her attention on the assigned task, ensuring that the message that reaches your readers is clear, accurate, and compelling. To find out how our experts in communications can help yours in any line of business, call us at 703-925-9100.