**Structure of Newspaper organization**

The Editorial Pyramid

It has a whole range of people for the collection of news and production to making of the pages

The structure of Newspaper organization

The emphasis in newspaper work has long – too long, perhaps – been put upon the reporter. While there is no wish to take from him credit for his many superb contributions to the excellence of the modern newspaper’s it out to be realized that there is a man who stands between him and his critical public – the copy editor.

It is seldom that the wit, ingenuity and craftsmanship of the copy editor rescue the reporters. It is the editorial pencil as much as the reportorial typewriter that puts before the public daily the readable information of the world’s happenings. It is the copyeditor or the sub-editor (as he is popularly called) who is essentially that guardian of what gets into the newspaper and how it looks when it gets there. He detects the errors, corrects the English, cuts out the dead wood of verbiages, and tones the story up to its roper pitch or down to the level required by good taste or the libel, laws.

The appeal of the reporter’s work is great; the activity, the contact with the world, with its great men and with its ideas, make the stimulation of the job unparalleled in any profession. But the copy editor is closer to the heart of newspaper’s power; he is indeed, its heart. Under his pencil flow the accounts of all-important happenings anywhere. This sense of closeness to vital things, plus the ability to shape information about them so that their importance will be shown in true perspective, makes the copydesk job second to none.

Whatever the respective merits of the copy editor’s and the reporter’s work, both is cogs in a machine that has only one object: to gather and publish quickly information of events. The newspaper strives to put before its readers daily the interesting and important happenings that have occurred or have become known in the preceding twenty - four hours. Information, to be news, must be new, fresh immediate, and it is the reporter’s task to gather and write it quickly and the copy editor’s to hasten it through the news machine into print.

To meet the requirement of his position properly the copyeditor must have a detailed knowledge of highly developed organization that has been set up to speed copy to his desk and through his hands into type. The machine is linked to all parts of the world by radio, cable, telephone, telegraph, ship, plane and train. Internally the newspaper office is equipped to transfer words from copy to print in minutes. The effort is perpetual to draw widespread information to a focal point and send it out again as a newspaper.

Not only is speed requisite in the gathering the printing of the news; it is paramount also in imparting information to the reader. The newspaper story is constructed so that the most information can be told in the least time. To convey its message effectively, the story must be clear, concise, and emphatic. The important facts must come first, the less important follow in their order. The headline likewise is a device to tell the news quickly. It is a further condensation of a story that has already been stripped to its essential in the introduction. The headline must be specific and forceful. Excess must be shorn away; facts must be set forth to the point of baldness.

It must not be supposed that this speed is uncontrolled. It is that of efficient men trained to their work. The following subsections carry the different people behind the making of a newspaper.

The Managing Editor

At the head of the news organization is the managing editor. From him or through him comes the driving force that keeps the machine at its most efficient point. On him depends the morale of the organization. His chief efforts are concerned with newsgathering. He is informed of the world’s events and through his subordinate editors, obtains accounts of these happenings for the newspaper’s readers. Essentially his object is simple; actually the attainment of that object is extremely complex. His plans cannot be hit or miss; they must be laid with minute care. It is in him that the qualities of the managing editor are shown to the best advantage.

For example, let it be supposed that the newspaper prints a small story of an outbreak of hostilities in Sri Lanka. This item is read by the managing editor as a routine part of his duties. Has it other possibilities? Is it worthwhile to send a special correspondent to watch the situation? A decision on this will depend very little on the facts given in the story. It will depend rather on his knowledge of the general conditions in Sri Lanka, whether these are such that there might be further disorders, what effect such violence might have on the Island itself ad what effect it might have on the relations of India with Sri Lanka and Sri Lanka’s with other nations. Answers to such questions hinge not upon the immediate situation, but upon the managing editor’s store of historical knowledge about the country and its problems. It hinges also on his sensing of possibilities, in short, on his news sense.

If he decides to send a correspondent, his next problem is to select the right man. The assignment is a delicate and a responsible one, perhaps even dangerous. The choice must be wise. In making it, he relies on his knowledge of his staff’s abilities and character. Success or failure in obtaining a story often depends on selecting the right man for the assignment.

His next step is getting the reporter to the scene, equipped with detailed instructions, if necessary, of what to do. This is often vital in order to maintain contact between the office and the reporter. How to send stories is frequently a major difficulty. There maybe a censorship, or for the other reasons communication may be erratic. Various plans should be considered, leaving it to the reporter to make the best of whatever situation he finds.

Covering a national election is another major problem organization. A vast temporary framework of communication with all parts of the country must be set up. Correspondents in strategic places must be obtained and instructed in detail concerning what information to send and when to send it. This is a task that requires several months. The outline of the campaign is worked out by the managing editor and his assistant put it into effect.

This is the fieldwork. The managing editor must also prepare his office organization for Election Day or election night. New, temporary schedules for editors, reporters, copy editors; composing room and pressroom forces must be thought out in detail. Virtually the whole machine must be shifted about for the handling of vast news story. When this completed and the machine begins to function on election day or night, and managing editor takes full charge of editing, make up and printing.

The successful managing editor plans to meet difficulties before they arise. He does not rely solely on one plan; he lays alternate plans for use if the most promising fails. If he cannot get the information he wants from one source he gets it from another; if he cannot get it at any time, he does not shelve the idea as impossible, but waits and obtains it when possible.

It is a mistaken idea that an editor is a man who wields a pencil over copy paper. Editing is rather the selection of news, knowing what events are the most vital and most worth covering. This is the managing editor’s role.

The Chief Editors

Downward from the managing editor spread the organization to reporters and correspondents, the gatherers of news, upon whom the whole newspaper structure rests. His immediate assistants are the city, national and foreign editors: the first, directing the gathering of the news in the city where the newspaper is published and in its immediate vicinity; the second, the gathering of the news across the country outside of the city of publication; and the third, the gathering of the news in foreign countries. Other editors assisting him are the heads of specialized departments such as financial and business, sports and society.

On a large morning newspaper there are duplicate editors for day and night to cover the span of the paper’s operation, and the day editors generally carry the chief title and burden of the position. This is by no means the common system but it illustrates the thorough covering and editing of news by departments, and the functions, if not the individual editors, exist in most city newspaper organizations. For example, most newspapers do not maintain foreign news-gathering facilities but the function of the foreign editor remains, whether on the day or the night staff. A newspaper that does not have a foreign staff may have a single correspondent in any center abroad, or it may rely on the wire services.

Likewise in the succeeding pages the copy – desk system is divided into three –city, national and foreign – for illustrative purposes, where as three general practice is either to combine the a national and foreign copy desks or to set up a “universal” desk on which all copy is edited.

City Editor

In the home city of the newspaper and in its vicinity the news – gathering machinery is elaborate. Since the business life of the newspaper is sustained by the community in which it exists, and since the greater art of its circulations there, local news must be covered in great detail. For the same reason, a substantial part of the news that is printed is of local origin.

At the head of this part of the machine is the city editor. News judgment, executive ability and a store of information of names and events are his chief qualifications. He should know his city, not only its geography, but also its history; the masses of its people as well as its important residents. He need not have encyclopedic knowledge, but the background against which he views the world be broad and human. This is apart from his ability to know news when he hears of it. News judgment is not essentially a thinking process; it is an instinct built upon many things forgotten.

If a local disaster occurs, it is the city editor’s task to get his reporters to the scene quickly. Not only must they beat the spot, but also each also must have a clear idea of the precise part he is to play in gathering the details of the event. It is the city editor’s function to instruct each meaningfully and clearly, so that no confusion will result and so that every angle of the story will be covered. Not all the reporters will write what they see or the facts they gather. The editor must pick his best men for that purpose; the others will get information, investigate and report their findings to the men who will organize and write the stories.

For example, a train wreck would be divided into the following angles: the story of the accident itself; stories of eye witness or passengers; the engineer’s story; the list of injured, or of the dead and the injured; the color story of the scene; photographs of the scene. In addition, if any were killed, or if any of the injured or dead were important person, queries would be sent to various places for information regarding them. Here, then, are eight angles, each of which will require at least one reporter and some of them several. Other angles might crop up as information regarding the accident reaches the city editor. If the wreck is a serious one, another reporter would be assigned to write a story of past similar accidents.

The reporter who is to write the leading story of the accident should be set to scene if time permits; if time is short, he should remain in the newspaper office and take information by telephone from the reporters on the ground. It is his duty to organize the mass of detail that comes to him. The subsidiary stories are written by the reporters sent to the scene, if they have time to gather the facts and return to the office; otherwise they also telephone the facts to rewrite them.

It is a sudden development, like the foregoing illustration, that tests the city editor. It creates a problem that must first be visualized; then a course of actions must be mapped out, and then action taken swiftly and with certainly. His plan of campaign depends on the size and abilities of his staff. If he has few reporters, each must be assigned carefully to obtain the best results; if he has many, the task is more easily and more thoroughly accompanied. But if his plan is loose and ill-conceived and the disposition of his men inefficient, the result will be confusion.

The assignment sheet is the city editor’ chart. On it is designated each story that is to be covered and the name of the reporter assigned to cover it. Every reporter is informed daily, usually orally, but also be noted, what his assignment is to be. This chart serves also as the city editor’s record of the disposition of all men under his supervision.

Much news is of spontaneous origin. In such cases the city editor is dependent on his reporters in strategic posts to learn of the event and inform him. He relies also upon the news services and upon outside sources. Any event anywhere is reported eventually in the newspaper office, as well as rumors of much that never has happened. In general, however, the newspaper safeguards, itself by posting men in places where news ordinarily originates. Future scheduled events are recorded in a “futures” file, on which the city editor relies in the routine of planning assignments. These records may be newspaper clipping, announcements issued by the organizations concerned or publicity agent’s copy.

The staff of reporters of a large newspaper may range from a score to a hundred. Many of them are specialists, versed in particular fields, such as public utilities, politics, labour questions, religious matters, aviation or art; others are feature writers, skilled in describing events colourfully, imparting the flavor as well as reporting the facts; still others are general assignment men, able to cover any occurrence efficiently and completely.

There are reporters with fixed assignments of beats, such as those covering the courts, city hall and other public buildings. It is these men who produce most of the day’s news, for they are placed in the spots where news ordinarily originates. Other reporters are assigned regularly to police headquarters and to various districts throughout the city, whose duty is to report spontaneous stories, to be alert for any news development, and to verify or to cover any angle of stories developing elsewhere.

Suburban correspondents constitute a considerable part of the city editor’s staff. They are reporters in outlying towns or cities, often employed directly by the metropolitan newspaper, but usually employed by newspapers in their own communities. The city editor keeps in touch with them by telephone, generally ordering stories but sometimes accepting also those that the correspondent has covered on his own initiative.

National and Foreign Editors

As the source of news recedes from the home office, the scantier become the means of reporting. Thus the day national and foreign staffs are similar to but far less complex than the day city staff organization. The national and foreign editors are acting a supervisory or directing capacity only. Removed from the scenes of action, they can advise merely or give orders by means of telephone, telegraph or cable.

The larger newspapers have established bureaus or maintain correspondents in many cities of India, notably in New Delhi. The New Delhi correspondent of a large newspaper is a directing news gatherer, virtually a city editor with a staff of reporters under his control. He is to a large extent independent of the home office and is responsible for covering the news fully in his city.

Spread over the country, however, in all important centers and in many minor cities, are scores of correspondent who supply stories of news events in their territories only on request, or only after asking the home office whether the story is desired and hw much to send. Scanning the domestic field and ordering stories is, in general, the function of the national editor.

In the same manner of foreign editor controls the gathering of news abroad. Still from the scene of action, his duties are even more generalized than those of the national editor. As in the case of the New Delhi correspondent, the heads of bureaus in capitals abroad acts as city editors in the cities where they are stationed and as a national editors for the countries. Under each is a staff, generally small, of reporters familiar with the country-concerned ad with its politics ad language. The foreign editor in the home office exercises general over sight over the whole foreign field. Not the least of his duties is keeping watch on the skeleton zing by correspondents abroad of cable copy, which, when properly done, may save the newspaper many thousands of dollars yearly in cable tolls.

The “Night Desk” or the Night Editor

The chief editors gather or direct the gathering of most of the news. In the late afternoon the “night side”, whose functions are to edit and to print the newspaper, takes control.

In a large newspaper organization, each editor is duplicated at night by an editor whose duties are similar, although modern practice is to fix hours of duty so that the responsible executive is available during the vital hours of the news gathering and editing. Thus there is an over-all night executive, usually called the news editor, with a number of assistants, varying with the size of the newspaper, who exercises general control over the gathering of news of events happening at night and over the editing, placing and printing of all news stories.

The process of “taking over” by the night staff is important, since it is vital that no break occurs between the day and the night activities. In the case of the city editor, this is accomplished by the transferring of the assignment sheet by the day editor to his night counterpart, the record itself being supplemented by oral explanations of the covering or the treatment of stories. In the case of national and foreign editors, no personal transfer takes place, except in special situations, but the night men, by scanning the messages that have been sent and received, obtain a picture of what has been done during the day.

Assuming all the responsibilities of the city editor, his night assistant in addition has control of the writing of most of the news, including that covered during the day, a function little exercised by the day executive. He tells the reporter how much space he may have and, if necessary, how to construct the story.

Under the night editor’s direction also is the city copy desk, made up of a head of the desk and copy editors. With the night editor begins the process of editing the news, which is continued to completion by the copy editors.

A similar system is in effect for both the national and foreign staffs. For these night editors the foreign and domestic bureaus and correspondents makeup the reporting staffs.

Afternoon newspapers have the same general organization, as to function at any rate. But their problems differ and are multiplied because they are reporting, editing and publishing during the day hours when news events are occurring.

The remaining important night executive is the make-up editor. As the liaison man between the newsroom and the composing room, he has authority in both departments and is subordinate only to night editor in charge and his assistants. His chief concerns are to place stories properly in reference to the space-required by advertisement and to typographical appearance, and to get the paper to press on time. Working from dummy pages that indicate the placing and the space occupied dummy pages that indicate the placing ad the space occupied by display advertisements and from galley proofs of news stories, he organizes the page layouts and indicates to the composing-room force where the news stories are to appear. The dressing up of the newspaper to make the display of news attractive depends upon the make-up editor and his assistants.

The Copy Editor

Errors creep into newspaper copy from many sources. News passes through many hands; it is garbled in transmission; it is written and rewritten by men of varied ages, education and temperament, it is read and edited under similar conditions. Wrong perspective or partisanship, too much enthusiasm or too little, may handicap a story. The very speed with which newspapers must be printed permits mistakes to slip by the many persons who handle news in its course through the news machine. The continuous struggle of the newspaper is to eliminate errors. Many checks have been set up against them and the chief of these is the copy editor.

The Importance of the Copyeditor

The copy editor is virtually the last man between his newspaper and the public. The copy may have been read several times before it reaches him, but its ultimate form, phraseology and spirit rest in his hands. Mistakes or poor writing that pass him are almost certain to reach the reader in print. They may be detected in the office in time to be corrected, but many such blunders are never discovered except by the newspaper reader.

The greatest weapon of the copy editor in his efforts to eliminate errors is an alertness that challenges every fact, every name, and virtually every word. Every fact should be checked. Those that appear incorrect and cannot be verified must be eliminated. Statements that are absurd or dangerous are deleted without question. Likewise the facts should be weighted against one another to assure consistency.

The function of the copy editor is critical, not creative. Under no circumstances should he rewrite a story completely. It cannot be saved except by being rewritten, that work should be done by a rewrite man or by the reporter who wrote the original story. The desk man must cope with the material that is given him and make the most of it by recasting, striking out superfluous words, and substituting active or colorful words for dead one, expressing a phrase in a word and by other similar means.

The finished product should be concise, forceful, and complete. This should be the copy editor’s aim with every story, not merely with the important ones. A great news story virtually tells itself; it is the brief stories that most often are allowed to slip by with only a few strokes of the pencil to indicate that they have been read. Any story can be improved, even though the editing consists of transposing a word, shifting, a punctuation mark, substituting a concrete word for a general one, or an Anglo-Saxon verb for a Latin one.

Leaving unaltered done word that should be changed is not a trivial matter. The careful copy editor leaves nothing to chance. His object is not only to correct errors, but also to improve.

With a unanimity that is somewhat disconcerting to the copy editor, reporters profess to regard him as mutilator of good copy and there is some ground for this opinion. There are some desk men temperamentally unfitted to make the most of another, man’s writing; their conception of what a story should be is so strong that virtual rewriting is the only course they can follow. Such men must be restrained, and, if they remain copy editors, trained to the viewpoint of the editorial pencil rather than to that of the reportorial typewriter. The general aim of the copy desk is to preserve as far as possible, the words of the reporter, if they express what he desires to convey, and to retain the spirit imparted by him, if it is proper. As the final link in a long and expensive process the copyeditor can destroy the honest work of many reporters.

The business of writing and editing news in a cooperative undertaking, demands the best of a many brains. There is no place for pride of authorship. The desk man should recognize and retain the merits of the story given to him to edit, the reporter should realize that the copy editor often saves him from grave mistakes and generally improves his work.

The Copy Desk usually is semicircular or horse shoe-shaped. The head of the desk sits at the center of the inside curve and his position is known as the: “slot”, and he calls himself, sometimes, as the “slot man”. The copy editors sit “on the rim”.

Copy comes to the head of desk, who reads it to form an opinion of the required headline information, edits it as closely as he wishes, and passes it to one of the copy editors. When the copy has been edited in detail and headline and, it is returned to the head of the desk. If the edited copy and the headline meet with his approval, both are sent to the composing room. If there is criticism either the necessary corrections are made in the copy or the deadline is rewritten or rephrased.

In giving copy to his editors the head of the desk takes into consideration their abilities or their special knowledge. Like reporters, there are some who are experts in special fields, such as politics, labor questions, railroads, art or literature; others are especially adept at writing feature headlines and still others are able to cope with stories of any kind. Some are slow, careful; others are quick as well as accurate. Speed is a necessity when the deadline draws near.

The copy editor’s approach to the task depends largely on his abilities. A good method in the case of a long or a complicated story is to read the copy once simply for information and to gain a general idea of its structure. Probably in this reading any obvious inconsistencies in facts or faults in construction will be detected and corrected, by editing in the former case and by rearrangement in the latter. The next step is a second reading for loose editing with attention to the standards set forth later. A third reading of the edited copy, while not necessary in many instances, is an additional safeguard to assure a product as finished as it lies in the powerful of the copy editor to achieve.

Cable copy offers another problem, different from that of editing local or telegraph copy. This is owing to the practice of skeleton zing before they are cabled in order to reduce the expense. Often cable copy is as cryptic because of faulty skeleton zing as to become a baffling puzzle. In such cases, the background of the editor, his knowledge of the situation dealt with, is invaluable.

Not until the copy has been carefully corrected, is the copy editor in a position to consider the headline. His alterations may modify the point of view or qualify the statement of the facts in such away that a headline built on the original copy would have been incorrect or distorted. When the editing is completed it is often helpful as preparation for writing the headline for the editor mentally to stand away from the story so that he may view it as a whole rather than in detail. This method is not necessarily to determine the news point, which at this stage should be obvious, but to discover the most effective way to tell the news in the headline, whether, for example, to write a broad, all inclusive headline, or a narrow, more specific one that singles out one phase of the story.

The education, experience and knowledge of the copy editor cannot be too broad. The more he has learned; seen and knows the greater his value to the newspaper. He should have a wide knowledge of names, places and events; he must be well informed in the arts, sciences and social trends; he should know history and literature and be familiar with the machinery of governments and law.

It is imperative that is he acquainted with his own city, if he is an editor of local copy. He must know its geography, its people, its government, it officials, its buildings. If he is an editor of national copy, he must have a wide knowledge of national politics, movements figures and events. Copy editors dealing with legislation in the national or in state capitals should have detailed information about the machinery of legislatures. if the editor is dealing with foreign copy he must know much about the politics , economics and government of the countries concerned and of their recent history at least. Finally the copy editor must have commonsense. The logic he uses to test the reasonableness of assertions in news stories is the same logic he uses and applies in every day affairs.

The habit of newspapers is necessary to the copy editor as well as to editors and reporters. To know what the new development of a continuing story is, it is necessary to know what has been printed. It seems elementary that the newspaperman should know what is in his own newspaper, but many are careless in this respect. The copy editor who does not read it thoroughly is not competent to handle a news story acceptably.

This is especially true for students of journalism; intelligent reading of the newspapers is the groundwork for any progress they may hope to make in the profession. It is impossible to learn anything about newspapers unless they are read for informational and analyzed for technical knowledge.

It is taken for granted that the copy editor known English grammar and how to write good English. Something more should be required. He should be a student of language because he is to a great extent its guardian. Colloquialisms and slang that are ordinary in speech should be permitted to appear infrequently in newspaper writing. The ultimate value of the copyeditor rests solely on his conception of what purpose his newspaper must serve and his ability to help it achieve that end.

The duties of a copy editor

If great reporting is not edited, it will produce, at best, a mediocre publication. Good editing is the key difference between a great publication, whether in print or online, and a mediocre one.

The chief duties of the copy editor include the following:

Ø     Improving stories by making dull or verbose copy interesting and concise. Copy editors can transform halting stories into ones that sing. Creativity is essential. However, as long as the information has been expressed clearly, the aim of the copy editor is to preserve as far as possible the words of the reporter and to retain the tone of the story as it was written.

Ø     Correcting errors of grammar, spelling and style in all copy, including informational graphics. Too many reporters, triumphantly bringing in stories that were difficult to pry loose from sources, refer to minor errors as “just typos.” Yet, the smallest error or inconsistency can cause readers to wonder whether that carelessness also extends to the reporting.

Ø     Correcting errors of fact and emphasis. An expert copy editor is invariably a walking compendium. Although reporters are better acquainted with their beats and their sources, the copy editor can supply a context – other stores, the city, the country, the nation, the world – that the reporters, whose single-minded focus is their story, almost inevitably fail to comprehend. Copy editors unfamiliar with the context must be adept at using many reference sources for quick research.

Ø     Judging news value. Copy editors must be alert to the flow of current affairs and understand how a single item integrates with the stream of news.

Ø     Guarding against libel and other legal problems. The copy desk is usually the last line of defense against legal concerns that could prove costly to a publication in money and in lost time.

Ø     Protecting and enhancing the publication’s reputation and image. Most news publications would like to have a reputation for accuracy and thoroughness in news coverage. It is up to copy editors to build and preserve that reputation. The personality or image of the publication – conservative or breezy, formal or informal, for example – is also largely in the hands of the copy desk.

Ø     Writing headlines that summarize stories and capture reader’s attention. Copy editors skill with concise wording and the ability to work quickly are especially valuable in this aspect of the job.

Ø     Selecting, cropping and sizing photographs and other art. Section editors, along with the photography and graphics staff, handle much of this work, but copy editors frequently are involved in the process.

Ø     Writing illustration captions. The idea that “a picture is worth a thousand words” may become meaningless unless the picture is accompanied by a carefully crafted caption, also known as a cutline.

Ø     Using computer codes to designate the headline and body type style, size, width and leading. As print media became computerized during the 1970s, copy editors assumed many production tasks previously performed by others. With expert knowledge of the publication’s computer system, a copy editor can, with just a few keystrokes, do much of the work previously performed by teams of production specialists.

Ø     Laying out pages. Many decisions about how the publication will look each day are in the hands of copy editors. Designers and other graphics experts determine the basic look of the paper, but copy editors work within the overall design pattern to lay out individual pages.

Ø     Exercising news judgment. Expert news judgment is essential as copy editors, working with other editors, make decisions about which stories will go on the front page or an inside page and how much emphasis to give individual stories.

Ø     Keeping up with the newest technology. Computer graphics, computer pagination and digital photography are rapidly changing. Editors knowledgeable about the most recent versions of software for graphics, layout and digital-image enhancement can produce better quickly work faster and more efficiently. Such technical expertise is especially valuable for editors working at online publications.

The characteristics of good copy editor

In a report from the Associated Press Managing Editors Writing and Editing Committee, William G. Connolly Jr., an editor of The New York Times Week in Review section, offered this checklist of the qualities of an outstanding editor.

1.      Confidence. Good editors have confidence in their own intelligence, knowledge and writing skills. They know the publication’s style, production capabilities and politics. They know the system – and use it.

2.      Objectivity. Editors have an extra obligation to be objective. They must be able to review the material in a broader context and disregard the personality of the reporter who wrote it. Every newsroom has problem people, but great editors have the ability to look beyond the person to the essence of the story.

3.      Awareness. Editors must be aware of the readers and the personality of the publication. Lay out, selection of stories, art, graphics and headlines should all come together to reinforce the publication’s personality. Look at products that are in trouble, and you’ll find a personality problem. Good taste and knowing what’s important are the essential elements of personality.

4.      Intelligence. Good editors must have a diverse background that enables them to bring to every story a sense of why it is important and what is means in a broader context. They must be instinctively aware of what is right or wrong with a story.

5.      Questioning nature. Good editors know there is no such things as a stupid question. They question everything. Editors know that if they have doubts, so will the reader.

6.      Diplomacy. Editing is a confrontation. Writing is both an intellectual and emotional experience, and good editors try to minimize the inevitable tension that arises between an editor and a writer. They understand the reporter’s problems. Nevertheless, although civility and diplomacy are important, neither behavior can be permitted to overwhelm the need to edit.

7.      Ability to write. Editors should be better writers than reporters are, but they still must be able to retain a writer’s style and ideas. A great editor’s work is invisible to both the writer and the reader.

8.      Sense of humor. Good editors are able to laugh at the absurdity of some aspects of the business – bad hours, bad tempers, bad deadlines, bad copy – and plunge ahead.

Another editor, speaking at a journalism educator’s seminar at the American Press Institute, said the following attributes would produce an “almost-perfect” newspaper copy editor, but the same general attributes would apply to all copy editors:

1.      Has a college education.

2.      Has newspaper experience, including reporting and editing.

3.      Is well-read, in both fiction and nonfiction.

4.      Is familiar with the news and its background.

5.      Has hobbies, enjoys cultural events and is well-traveled.

6.      Is quick and thorough when editing copy.

7.      Has a healthy skepticism that leads to the questioning of information in stories and a desire to release no story with unanswered questions.

8.      Is familiar with the rules of grammar, with punctuation and spelling and with style.

9.      Appreciates good writing and knows what to do with it.

10. Is able to listen to the rhythm of a story.

11. Has a sense of wit and pathos and the ability to discern the difference.

12. Has an orderly and well-balanced mind, which implies judgment and a sense of perspective and proportion.

13. Knows the laws of libel, privacy and copyright.

14. Has a team spirit.