

**Editors' Association of Canada
Guidelines for Editing Theses
APPROVED June 2006**

The Editors' Association of Canada/Association canadienne des réviseurs has developed these guidelines to aid its members and others in the editing of doctoral theses. EAC accepts no liability for use of the document or alterations to it.

In part, academia uses theses as a way of testing the ability of students, especially graduate students, to use written words for communicating ideas and arguments. Yet students sometimes ask editors to provide a full gamut of editorial services. This document provides guidelines for the ethical editing of English-language theses at the doctoral level. It is based on research with university administrators and members of the Editors' Association of Canada (EAC) who have had experience in working with thesis writers.

Guidelines

1. The thesis writer must obtain from the thesis supervisor written permission for professional editing. This note should specify what the editor is allowed to do. The editor must be assured that he or she, the thesis supervisor, *and* the student understand the limits of the work permitted. Appendix A of this document gives simple explanations of various types of editing and is a good form for the thesis supervisor to use in granting permission for editing.
2. In the absence of stricter limits, the editor should restrict his or her work to the tasks set out in EAC's *Professional Editorial Standards*, 2nd ed., under
 - Proofreading standards C1–C2 and C5–C7. Other C standards, such as C14, may be followed if they are pertinent in a particular instance.
 - Copy editing standards B1–B8, including the breakouts
 - Stylistic editing standards A8–A17, omitting the kind of negotiation called for in A16.
3. The agreed limits should be the basis of the editor's contract with the author.
4. The contract should require acknowledgement of the editor in the thesis.
5. The editing must never affect the content or structure of the student's thesis. Consequently, the editor should not specify changes that go beyond simple correction of grammar, idiom, punctuation, spelling, and mechanics and should be particularly careful in applying the stylistic editing standards A8–A17 and the copy editing standards B1bii, B1biii, and the portions of B1c that do not pertain to grammar. Rather than drafting alterations under these standards, the editor should depend on queries to the author phrased to put the onus on the student (e.g., "Please clarify this sentence," not "Do you mean $X = Y$?"). If the editor must rewrite a sentence to show a problem, he or she should keep to the student's own words as much as possible.
6. Until the thesis has been accepted, the editor should keep a copy that shows the editing—i.e., a photocopy of hard-copy editing or a tracked-changes copy of electronic editing. (Some faculties require the thesis writer to submit such a copy as well as the original unedited version.) The editor should also keep copies of query sheets, correspondence, and other pertinent material.
7. If the student's research falls under an institution's ethics protocol (that is, if human and/or animal subjects are involved in the research and ethics approval has been obtained) the editor must be made aware of the requirements of the study's ethics protocol. He or she should be provided with a copy of the ethics approval and of any amendments to the protocol that are

subsequently requested and/or approved by the student and by any researchers working on the same project.

Suggestions for Editors' Use

- Obtaining written permission to edit a thesis may feel awkward or unnecessary. But it is the best way to protect yourself and the student from censure by the thesis committee and the academic community. It may also be a way to get both the thesis advisor and the student to focus on what the editing will comprise. Appendix A to this document may be helpful.
- Some faculties do not permit any outside editing of theses, and others are fussy about what is permitted. Since the thesis supervisor has the final authority, you, as the editor, must determine exactly what he or she authorizes in a particular instance.

This determination can be difficult because thesis supervisors—and students—may not be familiar with the various types of editing or with editorial terms (e.g., they may think that *copy editing* and *proofreading* are identical). Their primary concern is the content of a thesis, not what they call *spelling and grammar* and editors call *copy editing*.

- The term *stylistic editing* may be especially confusing. Some supervisors and students may think that it refers to formatting, and others that it means substantive editing. You can try explaining that editing for style falls between substantive editing (for content and structure) and copy editing. Many people do not realize this step exists, yet it is the way editors fill the role given us by one graduate program director: “The editor’s job is not to produce a defensible thesis, it is to produce a thesis that ... [flows] and is at least clean.”

If the line between stylistic and copy editing is difficult for you to find, consider using a technique suggested by an experienced EAC thesis editor: “When I am doing stylistic editing, I limit myself to reorganizing sentences using the author’s own words.” Or contract to edit for only what another member calls “the mechanics of writing in English”—i.e., the B and C standards of *PES*.

- Even if you do not usually use a written contract with your clients, we suggest having one for editing a thesis. It will help both student and thesis supervisor focus on what editing may and may not be done.

Include in the contract a requirement to acknowledge your work on the appropriate page of the thesis. That credit will ensure your contribution is recognized. It will also alert the thesis committee to the fact that editing has occurred.

- Standard A10 requires you to “recognize and eliminate jargon that is inappropriate for the intended audience.” Think carefully about that wording. One of *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*’s definitions of *jargon* is “words or expressions used by a particular group or profession.” The intended audience of a thesis is experts in a particular field of study, so you should become familiar with that field’s specialized terminology and query its use with special caution.
- The styling of citations needs care. Thesis writers are often required to use a particular style, and their ability to do so is part of what is being tested. If the student has made errors, especially consistent ones, use queries to draw them to his or her attention, but do not correct them. Do the same for failure to give citations where they would be expected.
- Standards A14, A15, and B3 require checking logic and the accuracy of facts, including mathematics. When editing a thesis, you should not, of course, even question the student’s

statements of fact or conclusions drawn from them in the argument. What you are watching for are the silly errors, often in incidental comments, that creep into almost everyone's writing: e.g., "Edmonton is about 5000 kilometres east of Halifax"; "the 500-kilometre drive from Edmonton to Halifax"; "the police estimated the audience at 600, divided between 300 protestors and 200 supporters."

- Notice that the guidelines do not set out special rules for thesis writers whose first language is not English. Some supervisors may permit lenience, but most take the attitude that a student seeking a degree from an anglophone university should be able to present and defend his or her ideas in comprehensible English.

Few supervisors object to corrections of errors in spelling, grammar, or idiom. For example, "The cat sitted near the fire" and "The cat sat on the fire" are clear errors in, respectively, grammar and idiom. Correcting them is a matter of mechanical copy editing (Standards B1c and B1bi). The tricky problems tend to arise with editing for style and diction and are best dealt with by queries. "The cat roared by the fire" is probably an error in diction but could be exactly what the student intended. Rather than changing it to "The cat roamed by the fire," query along the lines of "? Please check 'roared' in your dictionary."

This approach and the tact it requires means that editing ESL students can be time consuming. Estimate accordingly, and encourage the student to view the experience as an opportunity to learn.

A final thought: If editors respect the academic purpose of thesis writing and the priority of the supervisor, we can help students (and ourselves). As one member told us: "We are a valuable resource for students as long as we edit these papers in an ethical way—a way in which ... the work that students submit is indeed their own, only more polished."

Appendix A: Permission for Thesis Editing

Date _____

_____ (NAME), a student at _____

(UNIVERSITY) in the Department/Faculty of _____, is preparing a thesis/
dissertation; the working title is _____. In readying it for
submission, he or she has permission to seek professional editing of the kinds listed below.

_____ (SUPERVISOR'S SIGNATURE)

_____ (SUPERVISOR'S NAME, PLEASE PRINT)

_____ (SUPERVISOR'S TITLE, PLEASE PRINT)

I have read this document and agree to follow it.

_____ (STUDENT)

_____ (EDITOR)

Please indicate below which kinds of editing may be applied in the present situation. The definitions are adapted from the Editors' Association of Canada's *Standard Freelance Editorial Agreement*, 1999 ed., Appendix A. The tasks are shortened forms of statements set out in *Professional Editorial Standards*, rev. ed., EAC, 2000. (Both publications are available in full at www.editors.ca.) Comments and clarifications specific to the thesis-editing guidelines are in curly brackets {thus}.

Proofreading

"Proofreading" is checking of formatted, edited material for accuracy of inputting, for adherence to a specified design, and for mechanical errors in text, such as spelling mistakes or small deviations from the {editorial} style sheet. (NB: "Proofreading" is often used loosely to include copy editing. Modern technology is blurring the distinction between the two tasks, but EAC believes they require different skill sets. If the same editor is to do both, the contract should so specify.)

yes no PES standard

___ ___ C1: Correct typographical errors.

___ ___ C2: Note corrections clearly.

___ ___ C5: Assess end-of-line word divisions and mark bad breaks {incorrect line or page breaks} for correction.

___ ___ C6 & C7: Query (or correct if authorized to do so) copy-editing inconsistencies or errors. Use judgment about the degree to which such queries or corrections are called for, especially when working with electronic text, where copy-editing and proofreading tasks frequently merge.

The following proofreading standards may or may not be appropriate for a given project. They should be specified in a contract for a particular job of thesis editing.

- ___ ___ C12: Handle proofing stages after first proofs appropriately. E.g., check alterations and the rest of the type, including line breaks, throughout the changed portion; check all page breaks, check the consistency and accuracy of elements affected by text flow, including cross-references, running heads {page headers or footers}, folios {page numbers}, non-text items, and the table of contents.
- ___ ___ C14: Watch for and correct the errors that result from the use of {computer} tools such as word processors, markup protocols, spell checkers, grammar checkers, optical scanners, and translation programs.

Copy Editing

“Copy editing” means editing for grammar, usage, spelling, punctuation, and other mechanics of style; checking for consistency of mechanics and for internal consistency of facts; inserting head levels {indicating the hierarchy of headings and subheadings} and approximate placement of art (including graphs, tables, maps). If specified by contract, it may include:

- metrication
- applying a system of citation
- editing captions and credit lines (citations of sources for art)
- editing front matter (title page, contents page, lists of tables, figures, and maps, and acknowledgements).

yes *no* *PES standard*

- ___ ___ B1a: Correct errors in spelling.
- ___ ___ B1b: Correct errors in word usage and amend infelicities and offensiveness in diction.
- ___ ___ B1c: Correct errors in grammar and syntax.
- ___ ___ B1d: Correct errors and inconsistencies in punctuation.
- ___ ___ B1e: Establish and maintain consistent patterns of mechanics {e.g., capitalization}.
- ___ ___ B2: Apply the desired style to citations and references; query any that appear to be missing. {The editor has no responsibility for obtaining reprint permissions but should point out where they may be needed.}
- ___ ___ B3: Ensure internal consistency of text and art; query the author about apparent errors in arithmetic and in other facts within the realm of general knowledge.
- ___ ___ B4: Establish and maintain consistency and accuracy in the styling of tables, graphs, and other art, including their labels, captions, and text mentions.
- ___ ___ B5: Treat non-English terms in English text appropriately and consistently.
- ___ ___ B6: Use accepted markings for corrections and for queries to the author.
- ___ ___ B7: Follow common practices and the {faculty’s} preferences for conventions such as the use of italics, boldface, and underlines, of metric or imperial measurements, and of abbreviations and symbols, the treatment of technical and trademarked terms, and the choice of spelling and punctuation styles. Develop and/or follow an {editorial} style sheet {a list of words or terms that must be spelled, capitalized, hyphenated, or otherwise treated in specific ways in this manuscript}.

___ ___ B8: Tactfully point out copy-editing changes to the author {use query notes as needed}, and ensure that these and subsequent revisions do not create further problems.

Stylistic Editing

“Stylistic editing” means work to clarify meaning, polish language, and other nonmechanical line-by-line editing. {Thesis supervisors may wish to authorize some or all of the following tasks. Editors can, if so instructed, minimize the implicit rewriting by querying and by marking spots where the text could be simplified or improved without amending it themselves.}

yes no PES standard

___ ___ A8: Clarify ambiguous vocabulary and syntax.

___ ___ A9: Eliminate redundancies and verbosity.

___ ___ A10: Eliminate jargon that is inappropriate for the intended audience. {For a thesis, the audience is presumably academics who are familiar with the technical terms of their speciality. What is to be avoided is what *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary* calls “language marked by affected or convoluted syntax, vocabulary, or meaning.” One discipline’s specialized words are likely to be jargon to another.}

___ ___ A11: Correct or improve infelicitous connections and transition, parallels, and paragraphing.

___ ___ A12: Correct inconsistencies in the form and use of headings (e.g., inappropriate level, grammatically nonparallel forms).

___ ___ A13: Maintain consistent style in headings and in captions for tables, figures, and illustrations.

___ ___ A14: Recognize statements that should be checked for accuracy, and follow up as required. {The flaws the editor watches for under this standard and A15 are not those involving the content of a thesis but, rather, incidental references: e.g., a “billion” dollars becomes a “trillion”; “Montreal is east of Halifax”; “Ontario is the largest of the Great Lakes.”}

___ ___ A15: Identify inconsistencies in logic, facts, and details, and query.

___ ___ A16: Write coherent and diplomatic notes to the author asking for clarification or explaining changes.

___ ___ A17: Identify, in language and in content, possible legal trouble spots (e.g., libel, plagiarism, missing reprint permissions) or departures from social acceptability (e.g., gender, ethnicity, age, {or other} bias; failure to give sources).

Other Information About this Thesis

Add any information about the thesis or its writer that might help the editor’s work.
