Editing with Respect

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Handbook

2026

EDITORS CANADA

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Note: *This is the first edition of "Editing with Respect: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Handbook 2026", also known as the "Editors Canada EDI Handbook", developed by the Editors' Association of Canada (Editors Canada). It is intended to be a living document that serves as a resource for editors seeking tools and guidance on how to address the issues facing equity-deserving communities, as well as a starting point for how to edit respectfully in general. We plan to periodically update this guide and eagerly welcome feedback and suggestions, which can be submitted to publications@editors.ca. This document draws from many existing resources, all of which are included in Resources and References.*

Purpose and Audience

The purposes of this handbook are to:

- provide editors with a touchstone for how to edit consciously and sensitively using the current recommended practices
- promote a more equitable, diverse and inclusive culture within our organization, the editing community at large and the material being edited

This document is intended to be a starting point for editors who are interested in learning about and integrating a thoughtful approach to equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in their work. As we work with clients and peers—whether writers, proofreaders, designers, publishers or others—it can be very helpful to be aware of the possible meanings of language and how its use might impact certain people or groups. Just like editors benefit by learning about grammar, formatting and accessibility, editors will be able to do better work by improving their understanding of how language can be used to improve and promote, or deny and suppress, equity, diversity and inclusion.

Updated versions of this handbook will be published to ensure it remains aligned with language and EDI best practices as they evolve, and as new information and new sections are ready to be added.

Guiding Principles

Responsibility, authenticity and specificity are the main principles that editors will need to consider when assessing and addressing biased or discriminatory words and ideas in their work. These core principles are described in more detail below.

Responsibility

The driving principle behind this document is the belief that EDI is a shared responsibility, even though it impacts each of us differently and every document or text requires different considerations. Editors work with writers from different backgrounds, so it is integral that we reflect on how particular subjects or ideas affect us on an individual level. This will help us identify the topics we are well equipped to work with, as well as the topics that may require more knowledge or lived experience to enable more mindful and more effective editing. Editors are encouraged to learn and take thoughtful approaches to choosing sources when researching.

Authenticity and Specificity

Editors must remember that no community is a monolith, so it is important to support writers in being as specific as possible with the words they use and the audience they are writing for. The right answer in one context might not be true in another. We should aim to be aware of best practices while also leaving room for nuance and variation based on lived experiences and evolving social climates.

Note: To properly apply the principles that were just explained requires specific knowledge and an understanding of the client and their audience for the material to be edited properly. The reasons for this, along with the recommendations for who should be editing certain material, are grounded in the framework of intersectionality, which is described below. In this document, we have not explored the framework and its applications to EDI in great detail, but we want to acknowledge that the framework itself informs the outlined recommendations.

Intersectionality is the idea that social identities overlap to shape the experiences of individuals in unique ways. The term "intersectionality" was coined in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw, an American civil rights advocate and a critical race theory scholar, and it has become increasingly relevant to understanding the world we live in. This widely used framework is integral to understanding how our social identities—including race, class, gender, sexuality and disability—determine the privileges we have and the oppression we face.

Being aware of the intersections in our own lives can help us determine what material we are suited to edit. If the editing requires first-hand insight into experiences, communities or backgrounds that we do not adequately have, it should be edited by someone better suited to the project's needs and goals. The particular intersectionality of the writer, as well as that of the audience for the material, can also be important for editors to be aware of and consider.

Why Think About EDI?

Despite our different backgrounds, one thing many of us do have in common is wanting to feel like we belong and are represented in the content we consume. This may be true of both adults and children, who are developing their identities individually and within their social groups, and have a better sense of self and self-esteem when they see themselves positively represented in a story.

Editors play a key role in supporting writers who strive for equitable, diverse and inclusive representation in their writing. A writer can and should identify their audience and craft their material for that audience's needs, but the endless array of diverse backgrounds and experiences can make this challenging. Plus, there are differences within every community. Editors should recognize the areas they are knowledgeable about so they can do their best to help avoid people or groups being depicted in stereotypical or harmful ways.

While it is highly unlikely that everyone will feel represented by everything, editors should still strive for authentic, inclusive representation in the work being edited. Seeking out content that does not reflect our everyday experiences can help people gain insight

into new perspectives and backgrounds. Authentic materials created by and for diverse audiences offer opportunities for enriching experiences that allow editors to discover new truths, information and common ground. An editor with a more diverse base of knowledge will be able to provide more valuable insights to improve text for a better reader experience.

Knowledge about discriminatory practices and how to address them are increasingly important as writers and readers become more thoughtful, respectful and curious. Editors can also urge their clients to consider the many benefits of embracing diverse readerships instead of creating material that unintentionally limits their audience.

Editors vs. Authenticity Readers

At a basic level, an editor supports a writer by revising for clarity, coherence, consistency and correctness in their work while preserving the writer's voice. On the other hand, an authenticity reader (also known as a sensitivity reader) is a specialized editor who evaluates the depiction of specific identities, groups or experiences in written and visual media. This service is particularly vital when the material pertains to equity-deserving communities whose stories are and/or have been underrepresented, misrepresented or erased. We are using the term "authenticity reader" because it better reflects the skills and lived experiences of the editor doing the work. It also better captures the job's key responsibilities which are to gauge the authenticity and accuracy of material.

Differences

It is important to remember that an editor is not inherently an authenticity reader. There can be overlap, but this is not necessarily the case, and the responsibilities for each role are different. However, an editor can flag parts of the text for the writer, especially if neither has the required knowledge or experience, with a note stating, "This might be a good place for an authenticity reader to review." When needed, an editor can encourage the writer to seek out authenticity readers or consultants with relevant lived experiences and knowledge. If the writer does not have access to these resources, an editor can reach out to their network and the broader editing community to see if anyone is interested and able to do this work.

In discussion with Kaitlin Littlechild, President of Editors Canada and Executive Director of the Indigenous Editors Association, she noted that authenticity editing requires specialized expertise and is highly paid work: "Too often, those with expertise in these areas are expected to work for free for the greater good and are not adequately compensated for not only their work on the page but also the knowledge, experience and emotional labour this work requires."

There are key distinctions between editors and authenticity readers. We summarized the differences below.

Editors

- The goal of editors is to refine material to prepare it for publication.
- Editors specialize in spelling, grammar, language and structure.
- As Editors Canada's Professional Editorial Standards states: *Editing involves carefully reviewing, correcting and improving material and suggesting changes to help optimize the content, language, style and design for its audience, medium and purpose.*

Authenticity readers

- An authenticity reader draws from their life and/or expertise to help clients who are exploring topics they don't have experience with.
- The goal of authenticity readers is to identify offensive content, bias, misrepresentation, stereotypes and lack of understanding.
- Authenticity readers specialize in specific topics that vary based on their personal, professional and academic backgrounds. Additionally, beyond assessing the portrayal of identities/communities, authenticity readers can evaluate material that requires a first-hand understanding of certain lived experiences (e.g., adoption) or of subcultures (e.g., fandom culture) (CIEP).
- Authenticity readers will provide recommendations on how to improve material and suggest changes to optimize the text with a specific set of considerations. It can be helpful for writers and editors to work with multiple authenticity readers for certain material, even within the same community, because each has a unique set of skills and experiences.

Similarities with Editing

Editors and authenticity readers can work together to support mindful, cohesive and compelling writing. This is especially necessary if writers are writing about communities they do not belong to or experiences they have not had.

At the same time, like any other editor, an authenticity reader should be upfront about their expertise, be respectful and provide constructive feedback.

When thinking about how to address issues like racism, sexism and so on, there is a common misconception that editing and authenticity reading require censorship and/or sanitization of content. The responsibility of editors and authenticity readers is to make informed suggestions for writers, not decisions, and they are not responsible for censoring material.

Clarifying Expectations for Work

It is important to understand what services a writer needs and what you are actually being hired to do. For example, if a writer expects an editor to serve the function of an authenticity reader, or if they expect the authenticity reader to copy edit their document, they might be disappointed with the end results.

Contracts are the most useful tool for achieving clear understanding from all parties about the tasks, deliverables and expectations, and should be established before beginning any actual editorial work. If you are unsure of where to start or what to include in a contract, Editors Canada offers a useful template called Agreement Template for Editing Services.

Editing with EDI in Mind: Before the Project

Understanding Personal Connections

The educational book *Wayi Wah: An Act for Reconciliation and Anti-Racist Education* by Jo Chrona discusses the importance of "situating ourselves":

> *Everything is in relationship with, or in relation to, everything else. Understanding this relationality means being aware that we are shaped by more than the content of any learning environment; we are also affected by the way we interact with one another and how we move through the world in relation to each other. Situating ourselves by identifying who we are and our connections to others, and by acknowledging the land we come from and are now on, helps set up a space to work with each other in good ways. If we know each other better, we are more willing to listen to, and really hear, each other.*
>
> (Chrona, 7)

Note: *Wayi Wah* is rooted in Indigenous Knowledge and the First Peoples Principles of Learning. Though the former resource is intended for educators, its emphasis on anti-racism and reconciliation is relevant to this document, to the broader editing industry and to society as a whole.

As editors, the idea of "situating ourselves" is vital when it comes to EDI. It is important to ask: What are our personal connections to a topic? Do these connections aid or impede our ability to edit specific materials?

An editor's identity and background often directly shapes their strengths and limitations around editing material about certain topics, so it's important to carefully consider these factors before taking on projects. Editors are more likely to do better work when their backgrounds and bases of knowledge are aligned with the material being edited.

It is possible and important to educate ourselves even without lived experiences, but it is equally important to recognize that we may need to decline a project if:

- we do not have background familiarity or knowledge to edit the material properly
- our backgrounds make it difficult to work with specific materials because of bias

As editors, the intersection of our identities and lived experiences plays a significant role in the projects we choose to take on. Certain topics might be best assessed by an editor of a similar or relevant background so their knowledge can provide a deeper understanding of the material. However, some topics might affect an editor personally and may be too emotionally taxing to read, which can make it challenging for them to remove themselves emotionally or be able to edit the material without bias. In that case, the editor should refer the writer to another person better suited for the work (be that a different editor, an authenticity reader, or both).

This awareness is a crucial part of our shared responsibility to equitable, authentic representation, and it is important to be aware of when deciding whether to accept a job. This will not only strengthen the quality of the work but also prevent emotional distress for editors, particularly those who belong to equity-deserving groups.

Understanding Biases

Lived experiences can make someone a better editor with stronger empathy and deeper knowledge, but they can also make editors biased. Editors should strive to be aware of their own biases. They can then develop their skills and knowledge specifically to avoid the negative impacts of their biases as much as possible. It is important to understand the two main types of bias, which are explicit (or conscious) bias and implicit (or unconscious) bias.

Explicit (or conscious) bias

Explicit bias is the presence of a conscious predisposition, such as beliefs, attitudes or prejudices, toward an individual or group of people based on their identity or a specific aspect of their person. This predisposition can often lead to deliberate choices that actively (for example, through discrimination) or passively (for example, through avoidance) negatively affect others. Discrimination against specific groups is often rooted in explicit biases. People can also be biased for or against specific beliefs, attitudes, and preferences. As stated by the Perception Institute:

> *Expressions of explicit bias (discrimination, hate speech, etc.) occur as the result of deliberate thought. Thus, they can be consciously regulated.*

Implicit (or unconscious) bias

Implicit bias is the presence of an unconscious predisposition, including beliefs, attitudes, prejudices and associations, either toward or against an individual or group. These biases can often contradict people's stated values, and can seep into their behaviour(s), decision-making and interactions. Implicit biases are often formed by upbringing, experiences, cultural conditioning and media portrayals, rather than direct personal experience.

Editors and bias

Editors should identify and challenge their own biases because doing so will help them to flag any biases in the material they are editing. These biases are often reflected in the terminology used when discussing specific groups, events or ideas. Implicit biases are easier to ignore, but editors should also challenge their own implicit biases, as those biases may inadvertently contribute to the oppression of innovation or different perspectives and experiences. Editors should also be aware of the writer's and audience's potential biases for the same reasons.

To quote Editors Canada's Statement of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion:

> *Attending to bias in one's own editorial practice as well as the text being edited is a necessary aspect of addressing systemic oppression individually and institutionally.*

Understanding the Writer

Even with all the above considerations, editors and proofreaders may encounter a writer or client with an audience that has a very different background from themselves. In such instances, get to know the writer or client, their vision and their intended or actual audience. If an editor does not have lived experiences in common with the material—whether related to race, ethnicity, culture, disability, gender, sexuality and so on—then the editor might be missing a great deal of context, which could result in errors being introduced or reduced authenticity in the text, depending on the material. When editing material about people from different backgrounds than the editor, an editor should be open to learning and understanding the reasoning (or the lived experience) that might explain why they made those choices with the language. Editors can use this as a chance to address concerns about the language.

Understanding the Audience

It is the editors' responsibility to consider how words are being used and why, in which context, by whom and for whom. Editors need to understand not only who the writer is but also who they are writing for because this will directly shape our suggestions and

recommendations. As mentioned before not all writing is intended for all audiences, and it is important to prioritize the target audiences. Doing so will hone the quality of the work and make the material as authentic and inclusive as possible. Editors are encouraged to remember that every community has words that are used and stories that are told within and by those communities, but not outside of them. Sometimes, people may not understand the weight of particular words, so that is an area editors (and authenticity readers) can help with.

Editing with EDI in Mind: During the Project

Neither editors nor writers can be experts in every subject area. While editors should recognize when they are not well suited for a project, they should also be prepared for situations where a project is a good fit for them despite certain gaps in knowledge. To some extent, these gaps can be mitigated through research, open discussions and consultation with experts when required (for instance, if a writer is writing about a community they are not a member of and the editor is not a member of that community either).

The Editor's Responsibilities

An editor's focus is usually on the words and their meaning. A helpful way for editors to assist with potential problems is by flagging terms, ideas and characterizations that may be polarizing or harmful so that the writer has the opportunity to consider the narrative they are writing, the words or phrases they are using and the ideas being conveyed by said narratives and language. Editors are there to help their clients recognize that choosing one word or phrase over the other may affect the information they are presenting and how it might be perceived by the target audiences.

It is an editor's responsibility to flag issues and leave queries without censoring the material or censuring the writer. When editors flag potentially harmful language, they are supporting the writer by making sure their choices are informed and intentional. Editors should strive to read with an open mind so they can understand why the client is using said language. It may be that the flagged term, idea or characterization is significant or necessary for what the writer is trying to convey, which is acceptable as long as the relevance is clear. However, if the language is used in a potentially harmful way unintentionally, the editor can help shape more effective material that avoids potential confusion, embarrassment and harm. By doing so, the editor has an opportunity to help the writer recognize and challenge biases or notions that can have a negative impact while also improving the quality of the text.

A common example is when writers choose words or phrases based on common usage, without consideration for their etymology and how their historical usage might negatively impact select people and continue to perpetuate harmful images and beliefs. Specific examples include the terms “master” and “slave” as used in the tech world, or the phrase “totem pole” used casually in corporate settings. For more examples, please see the relevant links under Resources and References.

Communication of Concerns, Suggestions and Recommendations

When an editor needs to flag language in question, a crucial element for them to think about is the way they communicate their concerns to the writer or client. A writer who feels they are being criticized is less likely to be open to suggestions. They also might not be open to working with other editors in the future. Although these suggestions are generally important when discussing any issue with a client, crucial behaviours when discussing possibly sensitive topics are:

- be respectful when communicating concerns
- be open-minded and ask questions
- be willing and able to clearly explain how the suggested changes will impact the material. Editors can emphasis certain opportunities, including the opportunity to:
    - improve the authentic representation of the people, places and themes depicted or discussed in the text
    - make the material more approachable, which could widen the potential audience scope

As with any other editing, editors should be prepared to have thoughtful reasons for their recommendations and be open to sharing and supporting their rationale. For instance, “Remove this word because it’s offensive” is not very helpful, but “This word might be offensive to group X because historically this word has been used as an attack against group X” may help the writer understand the change on a deeper level. It is also helpful to follow up with questions like “Is there a reason this word is being used here?” and to make suggestions like “Consider removing this word altogether because it reads well without it” or “Consider changing to word Y because it conveys the idea without the harmful meaning, plus it’s more creative.”

Editors should make sure to always keep written documentation of their suggestions. Having these on record can help in case of any negative feedback or legal trouble that might arise from a writer not taking the suggestions. This should also be captured in their contracts. Additionally, when there are disagreements, an editor can ask to not be named in any materials related to the project.

Fundamental Disagreements

After asking the writer questions, understanding their intentions and examining the language in the context, editors might decide the use of the language in question is justified and proceed without recommending any changes, or they might still disagree with the writer. If the writer doesn't agree with the proposed changes, an editor can provide alternate solutions or continue to advocate for the original change. After that, it is up to the writer, publisher or organization to decide if they will accept an edit or recommendation.

There might be situations where a writer is not receptive to a change and the problem in question or the writer's justifications are not aligned with the editor's morals. Ultimately, it is up to the writer to decide whether they accept or reject the changes. If the disagreement is deeply rooted, an editor can always walk away from a project. In such circumstances, this should be done in a professional manner, as with all communications. Before an editor starts any work, they should consider including language in the contract that will allow them to terminate work on a project on grounds that are dealbreakers for them.

Recommended Practices for Inclusive Language

Although there are many different factors to consider when editing for inclusive language, we have compiled a selection of the most important factors to be aware of and recommendations for editors to ensure their knowledge or points of references are still relevant.

Flag Concerns

Watch for obvious or subtle examples of prejudice, discrimination and other forms of exclusion and oppression, and ensure the author is aware of these instances when they occur.

Context is Key

Be aware of the cultural and historical contexts for language and why it is used. Understand the impact of language, including what is considered widely acceptable and what is considered widely offensive to both niche and broad audiences.

Stay Up to Date

Language is always changing, and it is the job of editors to be aware of these changes and make sure clients are informed and supported in making conscious decisions. To do so, read widely, stay up to date about changes to language usage, and know what to watch for to help clients make informed decisions about the language they use.

Use Specific Terminology

Support writers in avoiding stereotypes and generalizations by using specific language to describe individuals, communities and events in greater detail.

Query the Writer About Language

When offensive language or potentially offensive language is used and it isn't clear why, ask the client for more information. Some contexts may have relevant reasons for including said language—such as reclamation or education—in which case the language may be permissible or even necessary within that context. Editors can make a big difference here, so being aware of what may offend someone or how words can affect meaning is important. What is acceptable to one person might not be acceptable to another, and what is offensive to one person might not be offensive to another. Don't assume everyone within a community will feel the same way.

If there is uncertainty about why certain language is being used, consider the following questions, which may illuminate the reason for the language:

- Does it have historical or cultural relevance?
- What is its relevance to the present?
- Is it relevant to the material? Key factors to consider when determining relevance are:
    - Is it being used for education?
    - Is it being used for reclamation?
    - Is it being used for shock value?
    - Is it in a direct quote being used for a necessary purpose? Is the writer making their reasoning clear?
        - As the National Center on Disability and Journalism points out in their style guide, "our sources don't always speak the way we write," and direct quotes with harmful language might be used if they are fundamental to the material. If the material is not meaningfully affected by said direct quotes, it may be better to paraphrase and use more sensitive language.

Identity-First Language and Person-First Language

These are two widely common forms of language that arise when discussing disability in the context of editing for EDI. The Government of Canada asserts that no standard or universal approach exists, though certain communities do have strong preferences. Before editing material related to disability, always ask the writer for their preference between identity-first or person-first language.

The definitions and examples for identity-first language and people-first language in this section have been adapted from resources listed in Resources and References.

Identity-First Language

- This type of language emphasizes the disability as a part of someone's identity (for example, "Autistic person" or "Deaf person").
- It can help individuals reclaim their disabilities and reshape the harmful narratives surrounding said disabilities.
- Some people prefer identity-first language because they view their disabilities as a central part of who they are, and believe that separating themselves from their disabilities reinforces negative stigma (National Institute of Health). Cara Liebowitz, a prominent disability activist, is one of many people who embrace identity-first language due to the way it sees disability as a core facet and recognizes the challenges of disability without the broader negative stigma.

Person-First Language

- This type of language emphasizes the person, not the disability (for example, "someone with schizophrenia" or "person with diabetes").
- Coined in the 1980s as part of the disability activism movement, person-first language can help individuals to present their disability as one facet of themselves rather than the defining characteristic (Journal of Teaching Disability Studies).
- Some people prefer person-first language because they believe that centring a disability as a core element might lead to stigmatization of the individual and undermine the other aspects of their identity.
- Person-first language is most commonly used in medical and government settings, as well as by some disability advocacy organizations (Editors Toronto).
- There are some criticisms of person-first language being used as the standard approach. To quote Cara Liebowitz, "Though person-first language is designed to promote respect, the concept is based on the idea that disability is something negative, something that you shouldn't want to see."
- According to Natalie Iwanek, a disabled Canadian editor who prefers identity-first language, "person-first language is also often used by organizations who advocate on behalf of, but often not by or with, disabled people." (Editors Toronto)

Characterizations in Writing

What is Characterization? Why is it Important?

One of the most crucial and most impactful aspects of writing, whether in fiction or non-fiction, is characterization: the ways individuals and specific groups are portrayed and what those portrayals convey, reinforce or subvert.

Writers and businesses need to be thoughtful when including depictions of real people or creating characters in their content. A person's identity is important; the ways that people are depicted matters.

Even the most well-intentioned client may unknowingly introduce harmful elements into their characters, such as reinforcing stereotypes and misrepresenting people and their identities. When writing about people from different backgrounds than their own, there might not have been enough research done to create nuanced, fully realized characters, which can result in them relying on stereotypes to convey who a character is.

How Can Editors Help With Characterization?

Editors should consider how characters' identities are presented and whether included details are necessary for the story or if the writer has unconsciously included generalizations or tropes. Editors should also watch for stereotypes and inconsistencies, and approach the client about their inspirations and how they conducted research for their writing.

When an editor flags stereotypes, editors are able to help their clients to:

- create genuine narratives and characters that feel authentic and resonate with the communities being portrayed
- strengthen stories by avoiding the use of clichés
- avoid untruths and harmful tropes (and hence avoid offending readers)
- accurately and factually present information without inherent bias

Editors should flag terms and ideas that make assumptions or are not inclusive (for example, businessmen). Sometimes writers add descriptors when there is no need (for example, woman doctor or male nurse), or they may acknowledge only one part of a couple or group of people ("The director and her wife").

These questions might help editors in gauging whether identity-related descriptors are necessary:

- Is the information relevant? Why or why not?
- Are all terms being used correctly?
- Is the language respectful and accepted by the community being described? To help determine this, it might be helpful to ask:
    - What is the writer intending to convey here?
    - If the language is not respectful or sensitive, is the writer aware of that? Is there a reason it is being used, such as education or reclamation? Does this reason need to be acknowledged in the material? (Please see "Query the writer about language" for more information.)

Common Problems in Fiction

Including characters and viewpoints from equity-deserving groups is important. However, when done poorly (for example, if done without research, adequate thought or lived experience), the result can reinforce harmful ideas and undermine said communities. Stereotyping and flat characterizations are common problems in fiction and can manifest in the following ways:

- inaccurate and offensive dialects, accents, and misspellings in dialogue
- characters from equity-deserving groups having only minor roles with little depth
- characters from equity-deserving groups who are included only as a plot device (for example, the only characters of colour are written as being disposable; the only characters of colour are written as villains, criminals or otherwise stereotypical archetypes; the sole female character is made a victim so another character can save her)
- characters with disabilities being treated as one-dimensional and in a stereotypical way (for example, people with physical disabilities being magical/mystical or being infantilized)
- characterization that focuses on one aspect without addressing the broader context or overlap of identities (for example, a bisexual character is discussed only in terms of their sexuality)
- generalizations around common traits within characters of a particular group (for example, all characters belonging to the group act, look and/or talk in a similar manner; characters are identified together consistently in scenes, as though they are one entity; fat characters are not included within stories or are depicted as one-dimensional, desexualized or comic relief)
- positive stereotypes that might add pressure on specific groups of people and undermine their individuality while diminishing others in the process (for example, Asian students excel at school)
- treating people as objects (for example, oversexualizing female characters)

As mentioned in "Editing with EDI in Mind: Before the Project," everyone has conscious and unconscious biases, and we need to keep an eye out for how these might slip into characterizations in any writing.

Editing Content About Indigenous Peoples

This section is based on several helpful resources that can be found under "Indigenous Content" in the Resources and References section. We would like to thank the writers of all these resources

for sharing their breadth of valuable knowledge. This section was created as a way to support the spirit of Truth and Reconciliation.

As mentioned earlier in this document, editors and writers must reflect on their lived experiences to determine whether or not they are qualified to work on certain material. Many of the resources emphasize that it is ideal for Indigenous content to be created by and with Indigenous individuals.

Non-Indigenous Editors Working with Indigenous Writers

Editing content written by or about Indigenous Peoples is complex and may require a different approach.

Here are a few key things to do when working with content that is about or by Indigenous people:

- Reflect on your understanding of colonialism and your knowledge of the systemic oppression faced by Indigenous Peoples.
- Reflect on your background and biases, and assess whether you are equipped to edit certain material (see Editing with EDI in Mind: Before the Project).
- Be open to discomfort and learning.
- Get to know the writer before getting started (see Understanding the writer).
- Be willing to do research to seek out and encourage seeking out and compensating Indigenous authenticity readers when needed.
- Be open to giving precedence to the writer's unique voice and their community's linguistic style over mainstream language rules.
- Take the time to carefully read and understand material that does not follow Western conventions of writing, storytelling or thinking. For instance, Indigenous stories can be more circular than linear—many have no precise beginning, middle, or end, instead taking place throughout a stretch of time. The impact of Oral Tradition often means that stories are connected using themes rather than chronological timelines.
- If you are unsure of where to begin learning more, take some time to familiarize yourself with the following resources:
    - *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing by and about Indigenous Peoples* by Gregory Younging
    - *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis, & Inuit Issues in Canada* by Chelsea Vowel
    - IEA [Indigenous Editors Association] Guiding Principles

Suzanne Methot, editor and educator, explains that non-Indigenous editors should be aware that some Indigenous writers do not want their writing edited due to Canada's history of settler-colonial society appropriating, misinterpreting, controlling and erasing Indigenous stories.

To quote Methot:

> *Editors who work with Indigenous writers need to be very intentional about not taking up all the space. Sit back, give up your "expert" title and use your skills to support the author in realizing their vision. Listen to their stories and their ideas for the work, and you will co-create a beautiful thing.*
>
> "Editing Indigenous Writing: A Nuanced Partnership" by Suzanne Methot, Editors Canada blog.

Non-Indigenous Editors Working with Non-Indigenous Writers on Indigenous Topics

To quote President Littlechild, "The use of Indigenous Knowledge by a non-Indigenous writer requires the development of a relationship with the Indigenous Peoples and communities from where it came. It is also an absolute that any relationships be genuine. It is far too common for these interactions to be shallow and for the sole purpose of getting permission or rubber stamping the content. Depictions of people and communities should also involve relationships and permission, this is a best practice that should be followed. There are many notable examples of when this best practice has not been followed and has caused harm."

To quote the *Writing Guide for Indigenous Content* by the Government of BC:

> Engage with the Indigenous Peoples you're writing about from the start of your project. Indigenous [K]nowledge may be sacred and require certain protocols be followed. Indigenous Peoples are the primary guardians and interpreters of their cultures. All communications with and about Indigenous Peoples must have their input, review and consent. This supports the principle 'Nothing about us, without us.'

As discussed by Rhonda Kronyk (who specializes in editing manuscripts by and about Indigenous Peoples) in an article for the West Coast Editor blog, including Indigenous

characters in stories is crucial because it helps prevent the erasure of communities. She recommends that writers who want to include Indigenous characters should "provide an honorarium and protocol" (which vary across Canada and across communities) to Knowledge Keepers from the specific community being depicted to write accurate stories. The same principle should apply to works of non-fiction that include any Indigenous Knowledge or stories. Indigenous Peoples are not a single monolithic culture, so it is very important to be careful and respectful.

If you as a non-Indigenous editor or writer want to include Indigenous Knowledge in your material, please consider these questions:

- Who is your audience, and what are you trying to communicate to them?
- How does the Indigenous Knowledge fit into your material?
- Do you have personal connections to the community this Knowledge comes from?
- Do you have permission to share said Knowledge?

You should not publish Indigenous Knowledge without getting permission from the relevant individual/nation, particularly if it involves Oral Tradition. If you have received permission, you must state this explicitly and acknowledge the original Indigenous source(s) of information.

The *Writing Guide for Indigenous Content* outlines recommendations for best practices, which are summarized below:

- Build relationships with Knowledge Keepers.
- Be thorough by consulting with a wide circle of Indigenous Peoples, Elders in particular, and compensate them appropriately.
- Create a collaborative agreement wherein the involved parties agree to share information with each other.
- Be mindful about who is storing said information, and have open conversations.
- Ask the knowledge source how they would like to be credited.
- Seek the source's consent for how the material will be accessed, by whom, and the contexts in which it will be shared. President Littlechild advises editors to make clear that sources have the ability to withdraw consent at any time, even after the material has been published. This will help to safeguard this information from being used beyond what was agreed to in the initial relationship.

Additional Considerations

Images

Images are just as significant as the text they support. Editors should assess the variety and appropriateness of visual representations, including, but not limited to, photographs, illustrations and even graphs or charts. Images can be included in print, websites, eBooks and so on.

When clients provide photographs or illustrations of people, editors should (1) carefully consider which ones have been used and why, and (2) determine if said images are bolstering the material rather than communicating harmful ideas. Visually depicting different identities and communities means that more people will feel represented when reading the text. This can mean including more people, and hence reaching wider audiences. It is important for an editor to be aware of their own and others' potential implicit or explicit biases when considering which images to use or include.

Accessibility

Editors should be aware of accessibility and make recommendations to improve accessibility if needed. They can play an important role in whether a publisher or organization considers how to make material approachable to as many people as possible. For instance, editors may suggest creating audiobooks and ebooks, adding descriptive alt text to varying types of images for people who use screen readers, conveying complex information through plain language or publishing material in braille. The recommended resources in the reference list are excellent tools to help expand knowledge and skills related to accessibility.

Conclusion

When writers move beyond stereotypes and include three-dimensional portrayals of characters or real people, they widen their potential audience and give more people a chance to be represented in the media they consume.

Editors can take the following actions to ensure they understand and are better aware of equity, diversity and inclusion considerations:

- Read widely, get to know people from many groups and learn to recognize personal biases, including unconscious biases.
- Learn about the cultural and historical connotations of language. At the same time, remember that language consistently evolves, and stay up to date on changes.
- Flag terminology and treatment of terms that may offend or alienate some readers due to reinforcing stereotypes, outdated and harmful language, or otherwise insensitive ideas.
- Suggest changes that will improve the text by reducing or removing any potential discriminatory material.

- Be flexible and keep an open mind about style choices or potentially important context.
- Avoid criticizing or appearing to criticize and focus on querying and building understanding.
- Be open to seeking help from other editors (or encouraging writers to seek help from other resources), particularly those with related lived experiences.

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