

Society of Editors

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Editing academic theses

These notes have been prepared from a discussion on editing academic theses at the [April networking meeting](#) of the Society of Editors (WA), which took place on 15/04/2014. The panellists of the discussion were Dr Anne Surma, Ilsa Sharp and Kerry Coyle, all of whom have extensive experience in the field of editing.

Services

- The [guidelines](#) for editing research theses state that only copyediting and proofreading is allowed.
 - o No substantive or structural editing.
 - That is the academic supervisor's role.
 - The editor may draw attention to an issue but should not resolve.
- Universities may have their own guidelines.
 - o University of Western Australia requires editing on hardcopy.
 - o University of Melbourne does not recommend professional editing.
 - o Some universities are unaware that the IPEd guidelines have been updated.
- Ask for supervisor's details and contact them if the student approaches you.
 - o Introduce yourself and establish your role.
- Find work through supervisors.
 - o If they like your work they will recommend you to other students.
- Offer a marked up page as a sample to prove your worth.
- This work is available year round, not near submission dates as you might have thought.
- It is good to have a background in a certain area, to develop a niche.
- Know the structure/anatomy of a thesis.
 - o Does the student want you to edit the references, bibliography, index?
- [Ilsa's questions](#) to ask the student before taking the job.

Tips

- Give the student a style sheet.
- Give positive feedback.
- Don't change things for them.
 - o Write:
 - "Make grammatically correct"
 - "Verb tense"

Issues

- Supervisors may be unaware that professional editors are available and encouraged.
 - o Supervisors may see themselves as editors and have difficulty handing the project over.
 - o Supervisors may think that hiring an editor is ethically dubious.
 - They would prefer family or friends to look over thesis but this is generally insufficient.
- Students for whom English is a second language may require a great deal of help.

- They often have clear and outstanding structural problems.
 - It will be very tempting to fix these.
 - Instead, use comment boxes to highlight issues (sparingly) or discuss with supervisor.
 - Supervisors rarely complain if you overstep.
- They may have different ways of thinking and analysing.
- They may wander around the point.
- Encourage supervisor to contact ESL teacher to advise on grammar.
- There are key differences when editing theses versus other writing.
 - You must make allowances for jargon.
 - Repetition is necessary to state the argument.
 - You must have self-restraint when tempted to point out incorrect facts.
 - You cannot always do your best work to produce the best outcome because it is not your project.
 - There are not many opportunities for a second edit/final proofread due to time and budget constraints.
 - Focus of job is to identify problems, not fix them.
 - Sending a PDF of track changes is recommended so that students do not automatically accept all changes without re-engaging with their writing.
- There is the conflict of helping someone to pass when they may not have the English skills.
- You must remember that the voice of the writer is being assessed and not make too many changes.

Payment

- \$25 – \$50 per hour.
 - 60,000 – 80,000 words = \$2000 – \$3000 (roughly).
- Journal articles for academics: \$50 – \$130 per hour.
- Surcharges for bad English and urgency (2 weeks).
- 60,000 – 80,000 words = 60 hours = 3 weeks to a month.
- There is often funding available from the university to pay for editing.
- Ask for an advance if the student is paying.
- In U.K. and U.S.A. rates 50% lower are expected/norm.
- To set a fixed price contract ask for:
 - Sample chapter
 - Word length
 - Contents page.
 - Then estimate how much time you would take.