The Modern Editor Podcast – Episode 22:
A Behind-The-Scenes Look At My Copyediting Process

Tara Whitaker: [0:03] Welcome to *The Modern Editor Podcast*, where we talk about all things editing and what it's like to run an editorial business in today's world. I'm your host, Tara Whitaker. Let's get to it.

Tara Whitaker: [0:18] Hello, welcome to today's episode. I am going to be giving you a little glimpse—a little sneak peek into my copyediting process. And I'm going to do this by showing you ten quick searches that I run every time I start a copyediting project. So, if you are like me, and you're a little bit nosy, this is the episode for you. I love getting a behind-the-scenes look into how people do things like, anything, really. But I especially like it when it has to do with editing because everyone edits differently. No two editors have the same process. And I found that not many editors want to share their process, at least, like, the nitty-gritty. And I think, you know, I get that. I was a little bit like that too, because I think showing people our processes, kind of, is like showing how the sausage is made a bit—could open us up to a little bit of judgment. Or, you know, oh, I don't do it this way or that way. But if you're listening to this episode, that means you're a modern editor. And, you know, modern editors don't judge. And this is a safe space to learn. So, I am going to share just a little sneak peek into my process.

Tara Whitaker: [1:35] So, I mentioned we're going to go through ten searches that I do that free up a little brain space for me before I dig into copyediting. Now, I admittedly run a lot of prechecks when I copyedit. I found after ten years of editing—more than that, but ten years of my business—it just works well for me. It's what my brain can handle, and it allows me to focus on other things that require more brain space. So, if your brain works like mine, then you might find these searches helpful. If you listen, and you're thinking, well, I don't like doing prechecks, or I don't want to search for those things, that is totally fine. You do not have to do them. This is just MY process, not THE process. There is no one right way to edit. And this list that I'm going to go through is not exhaustive by any stretch. I just chose ten because I have a ton. And this episode would be 400 minutes long and kind of difficult to explain via podcast. It would be a more live training kind of thing.

Tara Whitaker: [2:45] So, I use Microsoft Word with my editing because I work on fiction. But you can also do this in Google Docs, of course. But what you're going to need is either the search bar in whichever tool you're using, or the "find" function. And I'll show you, or I'll share the codes, or the—shoot. What are they called? The keyboard shortcuts to search for some of these things. And I'm also going to mention CMOS, which is the abbreviation for *The Chicago Manual of Style*. And this is the style guide that we use to edit books. So, I'm going to share the specific rules in CMOS when it's applicable, so you can go look up those rules and study them a little bit more if you choose. All right? Okay, let's get started.

Tara Whitaker: [3:35] Number one thing I searched for is double, triple or bajillion extra spaces. As we know by now in 2023, no double spaces between sentences. So, we

change all of those to single space. And we've all had a document before where there's either 400 spaces inserted for a tab or some sort of indentation. We don't work with those, especially your formatters because we need to have hard indents or styles applied, not those extra spaces. So, all you would do is simply type in two or three or more spaces into the search bar to go find all of those and delete them and make them the appropriate number of spaces.

Tara Whitaker: [4:25] All right. Number two are "ly" adverbs, and if they're hyphenated. So, as a general rule, adverbs that end in "ly" do not take hyphens. And you can look more into this in CMOS 7.86. So, these are things like *expertly dressed* or *superbly eloquent*. Those don't have hyphens in between. So, what you can do is, you can search for "ly-" in the search bar to easily find any instance of those. Okay, chugging right along.

Tara Whitaker: [4:59] Number three: further and farther. Now, this is found in CMOS 5.250, which is the good versus common usage. So, further is used for figurative distance. So, like, *Let's talk about this further*. Farther is for literal distance, so that would be like, *They ran farther up the road*. Those two are very easily swapped. So, that's a very quick search you can do to get those straightened out.

Tara Whitaker: [5:33] Number four is half. This is something that always trips me up, which is why I include it in my precheck. I can never remember what gets hyphenated and what doesn't. And I have a style guide I follow for one of my clients that further confuses me. Oooo! See how I used further there? That was for figurative distance. So, CMOS 7.89, which is the hyphenation table, is going to be your best friend. And you're going to hear me say that a few more times in this list. So, you can easily look up that hyphenation table and go through and find all of the halfs in the document and fix accordingly.

Tara Whitaker: [6:19] All right, number five are compounds like mid-, non-, pre-, semi-, over-, under-, etc. Again, 7.89 in CMOS. And these are easily searchable with typing in, you know, mid-, non-, semi-, etc. Those are things that are fairly easy to fix and so make a good precheck topic for me.

Tara Whitaker: [6:51] All right, number six is words that end in "like." So, hyphenated, like—childlike, lifelike. Again, 7.89 CMOS, but that says that those words that end in "like" are closed if they're listed in Merriam-Webster. If not, they're hyphenated. And then there's a couple exceptions in there. So, childlike is all one word. Lifelike is all one word. So, to find the ones that are hyphenated, you would type in "-like" in the search bar, or you can search for "like" to see if there are any that are closed up incorrectly. But be aware that if you search for "like," you're gonna get the word *like*. Depending on the content, it could come up with a lot of search results. So, keep that in mind.

Tara Whitaker: [7:46] Number seven, commonly confused words that trip you up. So, like I said, before, half is on the list because that trips me up. So does lay versus lie. I will never get it. I've come to accept it. So that is a precheck I do every time. So, I search for all instances of those: lay, lie, laid, lain, etc. That might be an easy one for

you, but you might miss—you might mistake here, H-E-R-E with H-E-A-R—add that to your list. Whatever words trip you up, make your own list and add that to your precheck process. I did this for a long time, and then I converted it into a guide called Elevate your Editing. And it's actually 60 pages. And it's a bonus that Freelance Editors Club members get because I would come across them all the time.

Tara Whitaker: [8:45] All right, number eight: commas with internal or terminal "too," "either," and "though." So, I'm going to go into this a little bit. What I mean by internal is when one of those words is in the middle of a sentence. So, like he, too, likes bread. And terminal means when that word is at the end of a sentence, followed by a period [or end punctuation]. So, she didn't like it either. CMOS rule is 6.52. But you're also going to use your style guide if it's applicable. So, if you work for a publishing house or a company, they should have a house style guide. Or you're going to go off a style sheet, which is created for a particular project. And we're going into the weeds here a little bit but, short story, CMOS 6.52. Check that out. And then you can do searches for "too," "either," or "though." And you can do the same thing with periods as well. And that will help you stay consistent throughout the project.

Tara Whitaker: [9:47] Two more. All right, number nine: double punctuation. This is a super easy one. Wherever you see two periods, two commas, two semicolons, you know, just accidentally put in. That's an easy thing to search for. Two question marks or two exclamation marks are also an option to search for. Most likely, those are errors. But sometimes they can be a style choice depending on the author and the project. So, if you're unsure, that's where you reference that style guide or style sheet or query the client to see if that was on purpose, if they want to keep it, or if they should remove one to make it a single punctuation mark.

Tara Whitaker: [10:28] And number ten. Last but not least, straight apostrophes and straight quotes. So, in a manuscript, these should be curly. And you can use this on Word you can see the difference where there's, you know, it's straight or curly. And how you search for straight quotes is, in your search bar, you're going to type in caret—which is the number six, but with your shift on—^34. That's going to find all of the straight quotes in a document. And then ^39 is going to show you all of the straight apostrophes to swap out. Ta-da. That's it.

Tara Whitaker: [11:06] That's a very brief ten precheck list of what I do when I start a copyediting project. I hope it gives you just a little glimpse into the process. Maybe gives you some ideas on what you can add to yours, you know, just give you an idea of what it looks like. And I know this is kind of hard with a podcast format, and I actually did this on Zoom inside the Freelance Editors Club where I did like a look-over-my-shoulder training, where everybody was on Zoom. And they watched me go through a manuscript and do these prechecks. And I did most of the prechecks that I do so it was lengthy, but all members get access to that training and the recording. So, if you do decide to join the club, you would get instant access to it ASAP. So, if you're interested, go to tarawhitaker.com/club to learn more and to join. And I would love to hear if this type of episode was helpful for you. I know it's a little different than what I normally do. It's a little more actually about editing, copyediting, specifically. So, if you want to hear more

editing tips like this or any comments, I would love to hear them. So please always email me hello@tarawhitaker.com and share your thoughts. All right, until next time, keep learning, keep growing and know that you've got this.

Tara Whitaker: [12:31] Thank you so much for tuning into today's episode. If you enjoy *The Modern Editor Podcast*, I would be so grateful if you left us a review over on iTunes. And as always, you can head to tarawhitaker.com to connect with me and stay in touch. We'll chat again soon.