

## The Modern Editor Podcast – Episode 28: How Many Hours A Day Can You Edit?

**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, hello! Welcome back to the podcast. We have got another short-ish episode for you today. And it's revolving around one of the most common questions I get from editors, especially new editors. And that question is, How many hours can you edit in a day? And it's a super valid question, right? Because we don't know what we don't know. And the answer, or perhaps not-so-straightforward answer, just might surprise you. So, we're going to talk about this because it's going to help us determine a lot of things in our business. It's going to help us have our businesses fit into our lives, not the other way around. It's going to help us set boundaries, it's going to help us determine what projects we can take on, and it's going to help us set realistic deadlines for our clients.

**Tara Whitaker:** [1:07] And if you're coming from a traditional 9-to-5, you might think the answer is well, eight hours a day, right? Or nine hours if we're being honest about normal 9-to-5s, or 10 hours. And for some people it can be that, but in my experience, it's actually way less than that. So, to answer the question, I'm actually going to pose different questions to help you figure out how much you can edit in a day. Because there is no one definitive answer. It's going to be different for everyone.

**Tara Whitaker:** [1:41] So the question of how many hours a day you can edit? It depends. My famous answer—it depends. And it's also going to be an estimate. It can change by the day, by the week, by the month, by your season of life. I mean, by so many different things. And it might not be the exact answer you're looking for. But it is the truthful one. And every single editor listening to this episode is going to have a different perspective, a different background, different experience, that's going to all factor into how many hours you can edit in a day.

**Tara Whitaker:** [2:20] Now, I will say this, based on some very unofficial, unscientific research, some lurking in editing groups that I'm a part of, and just 10-plus years of experience, I'm going to say the average—average in air quotes and a very heavy emphasis on *average*—from what I see is about four to five hours a day of editing. Now, that could be your average, it could be way more than yours, it could be way less. That's why we're going to ask these questions. And I want to reiterate that it doesn't actually really matter how many hours a day you can edit. You're not in competition with anyone else. You know, if you edit three hours a day and someone else can edit seven, that doesn't mean they're any better or you're any worse. There's none of that. It's just important to know your capacity. And it's important so that you don't burn out, like I did. Check Episode 26 if you want to learn more about that. And it's also just going to help you provide the best service you possibly can.

**Tara Whitaker:** [3:27] So here are the questions I want you to answer to think about yourself to think about and figure out what your daily editing capacity is. And think of these questions as like a puzzle piece. Each question is a piece, and it's going to create this puzzle and that puzzle is going to be your editing capacity. And except for the first question, the rest of the questions aren't in any particular order.

**Tara Whitaker:** [3:49] So, the first one, what does a typical workday look like for you? Or if you're brand new, what do you want a typical day to look like? Again, emphasis on *typical* because we all know every day is different. And now if you need some help with this, I suggest listening to Episode 25 about how to do a time audit. Because for a lot of us, we don't actually know where our time goes during the day. And that will help you get a clear picture on that. So, from the time you wake up to the time you go to bed, what does a typical day work like? \*ha\* What does a typical workday look like?

**Tara Whitaker:** [4:25] And some factors to consider: Are you a caregiver of some sort? You know, are you a parent? Does your schedule revolve around someone else's? Do you have large chunks of downtime? Do you have short snippets of time? Do you deal with a lot of interruptions? Do you work a 9-to-5 and then your editing business is a side hustle, perhaps, you know, in the mornings or during lunch hour or the nights or the weekends? What does that day look like for you? So have a general idea of that.

**Tara Whitaker:** [4:55] And then the next four questions are all related. So, I'm going to list them out and then I'll go back and dive into each one a little bit more. So, the first one is what type of editing are you doing? How much focus does that editing demand on your brain? How familiar are you with the project material? And what's your typical editing speed? So, let's go into each of those.

**Tara Whitaker:** [5:19] What type of editing are you doing? We all know there's different types of editing. There're different types of coaching that can be included in here as well. And certain editing services, or certain coaching services, tax your brain differently. So, for me, I am mostly a copyeditor and a proofreader. I have done developmental editing—it's not my favorite. So, if I were to do a developmental editing project right now, it would hurt my brain way more. It would take me way longer. It would take a lot more mental capacity. It would just be different because it's out of my norm.

**Tara Whitaker:** [5:53] So, take the type of editing you're doing into consideration and also how much focus it takes. As we know, editing isn't something you can just flit in and out of, you know. For most of us, we need decently large chunks of time to be able to get into the material. Of course, that depends on what type of editing you're doing, but it's really not something you can hop in for five minutes, hop out. Hop back in for ten minutes hop out. That can be very difficult. So how much uninterrupted focus time can your brain handle that day? Because we all know our brains can handle different things on different days.

**Tara Whitaker:** [6:30] And now, how familiar are you with the project material? So, we'll give myself as an example again. I mostly edit—at this current time—mystery, thriller, suspense, and romance. I would consider myself an expert at those because I've been

doing it for a very long time. Now, if someone were to send me a nonfiction, something, anything, a memoir. I'm very unfamiliar with that. It would take me way longer. And I probably wouldn't be able to edit as much in a day because it would be so mentally taxing. So, consider what the project material is, how well you know it, how well you know the editing type, and that's going to play a big part.

**Tara Whitaker:** [7:14] And then what's your typical editing speed? And, of course, that varies by the type of editing. And it's something you might not know, especially if you're new, but it is something to remind yourself to keep track of as you start working more. Obviously, you're going to go way slower when you're newer. Perhaps you speed up a bit, or perhaps not. Perhaps you just edit at the rate you edit, and that's okay. But if you want to get a very over—overview, we'll just call it—the EFA does have the rate chart that has a median speed on it. I believe it's pages per hour for different editing types. You can use that as a base, if you don't know. But time yourself as you continue to get editing jobs, just to see how long types take you.

**Tara Whitaker:** [8:05] Now this one might be a little funny, but how much do you have to look at words in your life, overall? And what I mean by this is, outside of your one editing job you're working on—let's just call it, say you're doing one editing job—what else do you have to do in your life that is you reading words? Do you have multiple editing projects going on at the same time that you have to juggle? Are you a writer yourself and you're writing your own content? Whatever that may be. Do you have a writing job where you have to write whatever type of content for pay? Do you like to read for fun? All of those things that involve you reading and looking at words, it plays a part.

**Tara Whitaker:** [8:52] And I mention this because I specifically talk about it in Episode 12, when I talk about things I wish I'd known when I started my business, is that I had no idea how much editing would affect my leisure reading. And for me, leisure reading is a non-negotiable. Like it is part of who I am. It is something I have to have in my life or else I'm cranky, cranky, cranky. But I didn't realize that when I stared at words all day at my job while editing, the last thing I wanted to do was stare at more words for fun at night. I got really into TV at that time because I couldn't, I just couldn't look at words either on a page or a screen. And my reading habits fell way off, because I just couldn't juggle both. And that was not something I was interested in doing. Reading for fun has to be a part of my life, so if you're the same way, take that into account when you think about how many hours a day you want to edit.

**Tara Whitaker:** [9:55] This is a good one: What else do you have to do in your business? We all know that owning your own freelance editing business is not just editing. I wish it was. That would be lovely. But sadly, that's not the case. There are so many other hats we wear. We have to do our own bookkeeping and accounting, or hire it out, of course. We have to do marketing, we have to email our clients, we have to network. Maybe we offer other services. We have to put our time toward content creation or social media, we have to put our CEO hat on to think long term and what we want to do in terms of goals and where we want to take our business. There's so much more to it than just editing. So, you have to factor that into your weekly schedule,

because those things are incredibly important. And we oftentimes don't necessarily think about them because we think *Oh, well, we have an editing business. We just have to edit.* Not the case.

**Tara Whitaker:** [10:54] Okay, the next two are related, but I'll go into each one of them separately. The first one is your physical ability. And we're talking across the board here. Eye strain is huge for us staring at a screen all day or at a book or paper. But staring a lot. A lot of us have our butts in chairs, our wrists, our necks, our posture, all of those things that editors or people who sit at a desk for the most part, have to think about. And outside of that, what other physical abilities do you need to take into account? For example, right now, at the time of this recording, I have a broken ankle and a huge boot. And it is awkward and heavy and annoying. So, when I first broke my ankle, I had to work from bed because I had to have my foot elevated higher than my heart. Which is not something you want to do while sitting. It's very awkward. So, I was working from bed, which was great, and I was super grateful that I was able to do that. I didn't have to go into an office. But was I able to edit as much as I normally could? No! My ankle or my body was like, *I need to repair this broken bone.* All of my energy is going toward that. It was not going toward fueling my brain. So of course, my editing capacity wasn't normal. That, we have to factor things in like that—chronic illnesses any other physical attributes, physical things we have to take into account.

**Tara Whitaker:** [12:31] And when we talk about physical, we of course have to talk about our mental and emotional load at the time. There are days where I just can't, I just don't wanna. I have definitely had days where I'm supposed to edit, and I don't because it's just too mentally taxing. I just have other things going on in my brain and I can't focus. And to go along with that is my next question of, Have you made adjustments for what I call #life? Illnesses, unexpected stuff that always pops up, you know, just slow or icky mental health days, where you just, you don't wanna. You don't want to do anything, you can't focus, whatever the case may be for you. Keep that in mind. Because those days are going to happen, and you have to account for that.

**Tara Whitaker:** [13:19] And the last question. Maybe this is the most important question, but it kind of sums up the rest is, How many hours do you actually even want to edit a day? How much do you want to do? You're the boss, this is your business. You get to dictate how many hours a day you want to edit. If that's two, great! If that's ten, great. Perhaps rethink that a little bit, if that's sustainable, but it's your decision. How much do you want to edit?

**Tara Whitaker:** [13:49] Okay, so now that we have all of those answers, or at least some idea of those answers to those questions, you're going to be able to have a rough estimate of your editing capacity. And here is how you can apply this new knowledge to your business. Once you know how many hours a day you can edit, you can gain a bit more control over your calendar. You can, if it helps you, schedule out your days. So, let's say you want to edit four hours a day, now you know, okay, if I have this project, I need to edit four hours a day for however many days (which we'll get into), then you can block that out in your calendar. Now, time blocking like that doesn't help some people,

that's totally fine. But if it is something that you're interested in, or it helps you to have that block scheduled out, this is a great way to do that.

**Tara Whitaker:** [14:38] To go along with that you know how long a project will take, which will allow you to create a realistic deadline for your client. So, I'm just going to give you a very basic example. Let's say that you can edit five hours a day. You have a 50,000-word novel. That means if you edit five hours a day, you can finish this project in 10 days. And whatever days those are, if you want to do weekdays, if you want to include weekends, whatever. So, 50 hours to finish this project. Of course, you're also going to put in a buffer for #life, you're going to put in a buffer for anything you do like an editorial letter or final checks, or, you know, anything that you do at the end, that kind of wraps it up—writing the email to the client, creating the invoice, etc, etc. But let's just say it's 50 hours just for math's sake. So, now you know you need 10 days. Now, you put in that little buffer, let's just say it's going to take you 13 days. Now you can go back to your client and say, hey, great, I have this project... You don't need to tell them, I'm going to edit five hours a day and it's going to take me so many days, and I'm going to include a buffer. They don't need to know that. But you're going to say, okay, here's the project, I can have this back to you on this day. Done. And that's great, then you know exactly how to set realistic deadlines.

**Tara Whitaker:** [16:01] This can also help determine your rates. Because now you know if this type of project and this length of project takes you 50 hours, what is a good rate for you for those 50 hours? Now, obviously, this is another podcast episode entirely, but, you know, we can charge by the word, we can charge by the hour, we can charge by the project. But you can determine if what you're charging for this project is a good hourly rate for 50 hours. So, let's say that you're going to charge them \$1,000. And it's going to take you 50 hours, you're making \$2 an hour. Is that sufficient? I'm gonna guess no. I hope I did the math right there. No, I didn't. I didn't do the math. It's \$20 an hour, right? Oh, my goodness, why can't I math. It's \$20 an hour. I am into words, not numbers, okay. So, you would be making \$20 an hour. Is that an okay rate for you? That could be low for some, it could be high for others. So, use that to see if you are charging appropriately.

**Tara Whitaker:** [17:11] Having this editing capacity is also going to help you create boundaries for yourself. Because you're going to know your capacity. And you're going to be able to figure out if you can or cannot take on a project. If you've got that 50,000-word project that's going to take you 50 hours, but you already have two projects on your plate, you know you probably can't fit that in. Or maybe you can squeeze it in. And to go along with that, you're also going to be better equipped to spot the inevitable BS job opportunities that get posted out there. So, if you see a project, let's say it's a 50,000-word novel that they want done in two days for \$200. Your red flags are going to be flying, right? Because you'll know well, no, it takes me 50 hours, which, you know, even if you did eight hours a day (I'm not going to try and keep mathing), that's more than two days, and \$200 is not sufficient. That will help you determine what job offers are legitimate for you very, very quickly.

**Tara Whitaker:** [18:16] And just for the record, I've seen way lower rates than that posted, which infuriates me. But again, rates is another podcast episode altogether. So, there you have it, now you have a little bit of a formula or a puzzle piece–type thing to figure out how many hours a day you can realistically edit. And it's going to be a rough estimate, it's going to change, it can change quite frequently. But it is a great start and a good baseline to have in your pocket. So, you can determine all those things we just talked about with boundaries and deadlines and rates, etc. And it's just, it's going to give you more control over your calendar, it's going to give you more control over your business.

**Tara Whitaker:** [5:19] So that's it. If you want to talk more about this, like how to figure out your particular puzzle, or you want more advice on how to figure out this type of thing, let me know. There's a free 15-minute call on my website at [tarawhitaker.com](http://tarawhitaker.com). I am always excited to chat with other editors. So, grab that if you're interested. And until next time, keep learning, keep growing, and know that you've got this.

**Tara Whitaker:** [19:32] 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](http://tarawhitaker.com) to connect with me and stay in touch. We'll chat again soon.