Episode 167
Errors in Books: The Math Behind Imperfect Editing

Jodi Brandon [00:00:05]:
Welcome to the right publish market podcast. If you're an entrepreneur considering writing a book to serve your business, you're in the right place. Or maybe you've already decided that's even better. I'm your host, Jody Brandon, book publishing partner for entrepreneurs and 20 year veteran of the book publishing industry. On the right publish market podcast. In addition to learning from me, you'll meet entrepreneurs just like you and hear about their experiences as we explore all facets of writing, publishing, and marketing a book that will help your business grow in ways you might not even have dreamed of yet. Have you ever been extremely frustrated as a reader? When you're reading a book and all of a sudden you come across a typo or the wrong word being used or some other kind of error, and you wonder to yourself, how the heck did this happen? This is a published book. Whether it's self published, traditionally published, published via hybridization, publisher, how the heck did an error slip through? Or a typo, or whatever the case may be.

Jodi Brandon [00:01:03]:
I have been there as a reader on a regular basis, and it's happened to me as an author as well. It's happened if you are an author already a published author, almost guarantee it's happened to you, because I don't know that a perfect book exists. And the reason for that is so simple. Human eyes do editing, right? Human eyes perform the editing process, yes. There's AI in the form of Grammarly, in the form of spellcheck, in the form of all sorts of other shortcuts and whatnot. However, copy editing and proofreading are done by humans. Humans are imperfect, so editing is therefore imperfect. Right.

Jodi Brandon [00:01:42]:
So in the book publishing world, we talk about a 95% ish error rate being acceptable. That means that if a copy editor catches 95% of errors, that's considered a good job. That's a good rate. That's, you know, when you are hired by a book publisher, you take editing, an editing test, or editing tests, plural. And that's sort of an acceptable rate. Okay, so, but if you backtrack from that and do some math, let's say your manuscript started with 100 errors. That means five errors are going to slip all the way through. And that's still okay.

Jodi Brandon [00:02:19]:
Considered okay. It's not okay as in all right, but it's considered acceptable. So think about that. Multiply that. If a book has 1000 errors, 50 errors remaining is still within that 95% acceptable rate. This is more proof, if I may, as a former copy editor who still does copy editing, by the way, this is all the more reason for you to build in time for self editing and revision, you know, in your production schedule. This is a reason why you shouldn't skip copy editing, a reason why you should absolutely not skip proofreading. Right.

Jodi Brandon [00:02:54]:

The more eyes on the manuscript, the better. The fresher those eyes are, the more likely they are to catch things. But when you rush through, and I say this as someone who works with people like this is happening all the time in the book publishing world, authors will finish a first draft and then send it off to the copy editor. That first draft should not be what you're sending to the copy editor because you haven't even reviewed it, right? It's. You're just finishing it, and then, you know, I'll get an email from a client saying, you know, ooh, finish just in the nick of time on delivery day. Well, I know that it's going to be riddled with more errors than it might otherwise be because that self editing and revision time has not been built into the schedule. The more we read something, you know this is true whether you've written a book or not, right? Anything that you write, the more you read it, the more prone you are to reading what you think it says or what you think you wrote, not necessarily what it does say or what you did write, because our brains trick us. That's why you've got to go through it more times than you want to.

Jodi Brandon [00:04:00]:
That's why your copy editor is going through it multiple times, not just one time. Even if you know you have multiple editing passes, I can guarantee you each of those editing passes involves reading that manuscript multiple times. So you wonder, then, with all of those people, all of those eyes, all of those times on your manuscript, how are these errors slipping through? The math tells us that's how it's slipping through. That 95% tells us how that's slipping through. You don't know. As a reader, we don't get the before and after. Right? We only see the after. We have no idea what that condition of that manuscript was when it landed on a copy editor's desk or landed an approved reader's desk, or if it even did.

Jodi Brandon [00:04:42]:
Right? So that's one way it slips in basic math, right? Hey, business owner, if you've listened to this podcast for a while now, you know how important I think a writing routine is. Preferably one that's in place before you begin that book writing, though, it's never too late. So if you'd like some guidance in developing one, I've created the ready set write challenge for you to help you figure out where, when, and how you're the most productive writer that's gonna make your book writing so much more efficient. Check out jodybrandoneditorial.com readyset write now back to the show another way, especially with self publishing, which you know I am an advocate of, but the author has the total and final control over those changes that an editor suggests. An editor is working in Microsoft Word using track changes or in Google Docs using suggested edits, I think it's called. But the author then goes through and accepts them or rejects them one by one. Sometimes an author's in the group doing their thing and something gets missed accidentally. That happens.

Jodi Brandon [00:05:48]:
Sometimes they don't agree with a change an editor is suggesting that happens. Also, they're the last one to see the file or have the file before it goes off to someone non editorial related. Right? Maybe the typesetter is going to be the one to upload to Amazon or Ingramspark or Lulu. Whoever you're using, maybe you're going to do it yourself. As a self publishing author, my point is, if changes are made based on the edits, I see this all the time, where new errors are introduced that you don't necessarily know are wrong or how to fix them. So that happens,

right? Sometimes the timeline just gets crunched at the end because the schedule has not been realistic, has been built in an unrealistic fashion, and then everybody's running out of time, so everybody's hurrying. So more mistakes are going to slip through that way. So all of these things, all of these are ways for mistakes to slip into a final book.

Jodi Brandon [00:06:50]:
Another thing that I like to remind people is that there are different style guides out there. So what's correct, quote unquote, I'm using air quotes for web copy or newspaper magazine copy, things like that. Academic journals is not the same style rules. They don't use the same style rules that the book publishing community uses, the trade book publishing community uses. So, like educational publishing is different, right? We use the Chicago Manual of style. There are a lot of differences between AP style and Chicago style. As a reader, maybe you are more familiar with AP style, so you think something is wrong that actually isn't wrong. That happens all the time as well.

Jodi Brandon [00:07:35]:
Now listen, there are typos and things that are definitely, you know, there's no gray area there. This is spelled incorrectly. This is the wrong word. You used to o instead of to, you know, whatever the case may be. But there are lots of times where it's a style guide issue. We're also errors versus style choices. Right. There are copy editors who are very, you know, sort of buttoned up.

Jodi Brandon [00:07:59]:
I'm going, this is, we're going to get this in line with every single thing in the Chicago manual of style. As far as grammar mechanics, there are other editors. I lean more this way. The style that I'm about to describe, where it's clarity. Trump's 7th grade english mechanics. Right. My goal for your manuscript is that your reader gets to the point you want them to get to. Maybe that's more casual language where you're starting a sentence every once in a while with and or.

Jodi Brandon [00:08:27]:
But technically, we shouldn't be doing that, right? Grammatically speaking? Mechanically speaking, we shouldn't be doing that. However, if that's how you talk and that's how you teach, then I think that casual copy is absolutely fine. And I'm much more concerned with your clarity of message. Now, I don't want you to have, you know, obvious rights and wrongs like misspellings, things like that. But clarity trumps 7th grade english mechanics in my mind. And there's different schools of thought there, which is another reason why, if you haven't listened to, I forget the episode number off the top of my head, but I will link it in the show notes the episode about choosing your editor with Ellen of Sage House editing. Great episode. Her freebie is fantastic about questions that you should be asking.

Jodi Brandon [00:09:12]:
You want to make sure that you and your editor are in sync. You and your proofreader are in sync. You and everybody on your book team are in sync with your goals for the book and then making sure your manuscript is meeting those goals. So, obviously, no one is more frustrated

when typos slip through than the author of that book and the book team of that book, because it's extremely frustrating, especially when you have, you know, as a copy editor, I have worked. I've looked at manuscripts, you know, literally dozens and dozens of times, and something still will slip through. And then the printed book comes, and it's like, how? How did I miss this? How did this get through? And I say that even as someone who knows, I've just walked through all of these different ways that it happens. Right? But that's how it happens. It starts with that basic math like we talked about before, that 95% acceptable error rate, and then, you know, work backwards from there.

Jodi Brandon [00:10:07]:
But I encourage you, as frustrating as it is as a reader, to remember that it is equally frustrating, if not more, to the people who worked on that book, especially the author whose name is on that front cover and to know that it's not always just as simple as oh, nobody, nobody even edited this, because that's oftentimes not the case. So until next time, happy writing, happy reading, happy typo finding friends thanks for listening to today's episode of the write publish market podcast. I know just how busy your schedule is as a business owner, so I'm grateful you've taken some time out of yours to journey into the world of book publishing with me today. If you are looking for even more book writing, marketing and publishing information and support, check out my mentorship membership, the author entrepreneurs Lab, where each month we take a deep dive into one element of the book world with education, a q and a session with me, your book publishing expert resources, co writing times, and so much more. You can learn more at the link in the show notes. I hope to see you inside the lab.