

## Tip Sheet 19. Levels of Edit\* and Editors' Marks\*\*

### Levels of Editing

Robert Van Buren and Mary Fran Buehler of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory developed the concept of “levels of edit” in March of 1976 and published a booklet that outlined the concept and how to apply it. The concept was important because it helped to manage the time and task constraints in editing projects: it allowed project managers, editors, and writers to understand how much time, money, and skilled human resources needed to be allocated to particular writing or publication projects. For example, a major improvement in a manuscript required a large investment of time, money, and human resources relative to a smaller investment for minor improvements.

The levels-of-edit system is typically adopted by an organization that wishes to establish systematic guidelines that editors and writers can apply to a manuscript under a given set of circumstances. The levels-of-edit system, consequently, is an example of how organizations “institutionalize” solutions to problems of rhetorical situations their writers and readers face. A levels-of-edit system is the way organizations choose the best practice to help writers take text from manuscript to publication.

Nine types of editing and five levels of editing constitute the system. Think of the arrangement of the table below as moving from the minor improvement (level 5) through the major improvement (level 1); the higher the level, the more it includes all the types of editing in the earlier levels. In other words, a substantive editing includes editing of language, mechanical style, format, copy clarification, screening, integrity, policy, and coordination.

When you are asked to edit a manuscript (MS), inquire to which level of editing the writer expects you to work. Similarly, when you are an author, specify to an editor which level of editing is desired. Using this system the editor can then estimate more accurately the time and costs required to complete the project at the specified level of edit.

How the editing is done on the manuscript is with marginal and inline marks (see p. 2).

Types and Levels of Edit*						
Type	Level of edit					Functional characteristics of the edit (in the manuscript [MS])
	1	2	3	4	5	
Coordination	X	X	X	X	X	MS estimating, monitoring, controlling, scheduling; assigning document, page, table and figure numbers.
Policy	X	X	X	X	X	Checks that documents meet requirements of the organization in policy and parts of the MS (abstract, keywords, section headings, acknowledgments, references, disclaimers, etc.)
Integrity	X	X	X	X		Maintains consistency and removes discrepancies in the MS, especially in text, footnotes, figures, and tables.
Screening	X	X	X	X		Checks for correct spelling, subject/verb agreement; sentence structure; correct labels on graphics, titles on tables, and file structure/halftone quality on photographs.
Copy clarification	X	X	X			Marking copy for clarity in text and visuals, e.g., crop marks, table rules, mathematics equations and their fences.
Format	X	X	X			Marks MS for consistency of style in typography and layout, i.e., fonts, spacing below and above text (leading), mode (justification), form and positioning of visuals.
Mechanical Style	X	X				Marks MS for consistency by style guidelines, i.e., in use of capitalization, compounding, use of numerals/words, spelling, punctuation, etc.
Language	X	X				Marks MS for correct and concise expression of ideas, e.g., grammar, syntax, parallelism, etc.
Substantive	X					Marks MS for all of the above plus the meaning of the overall publication and each of its sections.
<b>Technical***</b>	<b>X</b>					<b>Marks the MS for all of the above plus the best configuration of the entire publication for the chosen media of expression (e.g., print, electronic, audio, video, combinations thereof.)</b>

\*Van Buren, Robert, and Mary Fran Buehler. 1980. The Levels of Edit, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Arlington, VA: Society for Technical Communication. Adapted from Table 1, p. 5. (Originally published as: Van Buren, Robert, and Mary Fran Buehler. 1976. The Levels of Edit. Jet Propulsion Laboratory, California Institute of Technology, NASA: SP 43-28. Out of print.)

\*\*\*Cynthia Chapman added the tenth type of edit (in red) to introduce editing a message in multimedia communications.



## Markup of Text: Marginal and Inline Marks\*\*

Printers, proofreaders, and editors use a standardized set of marks to annotate text and indicate changes; British and American standards differ for marks. Below are commonly used American marks that peer reviewers, substantive editors, and copyeditors may use to edit a paper manuscript. The “marginal” mark is inserted in the margin of a draft manuscript or a (first) printed “proof” (final “galley” are corrected by the printer using only the marginal proof marks). The placement of the change, the “inline” mark, is indicated in the text as shown below (note the use of a caret ^ or v to mark where a deletion or insertion should be placed):

### Delete and Insert

-  Delete, take it out
-  Delete and close up
-  Delete extra space
-  Insert space
-  Insert text
-  Correct letter

### Punctuation marks

(use caret to show point of insertion)

-  Insert period ^
-  Insert comma ^
-  Insert colon ^
-  Insert semicolon ^
-  Insert quotation marks ^
-  Insert single quotes ^
-  Insert apostrophe
-  Insert question mark ^
-  Insert exclamation point ^
-  Insert hyphen
-  Insert parentheses
-  Insert dash

### Other

-  Spell out abbrev.
-  Check spelling
-  Let it stand
-  OK "with corrections"
-  or "as corrected"

### Style of Type

-  Wrong font
-  Make lower Case
-  Set in LOWER CASE
-  capital letter
-  SET IN capitals
-  Set in Lower case with Initial Caps
-  Set in Roman type
-  Set in italic type
-  Set in lightface type
-  Set in boldface type

### Paragraph and Position

-  Move to right 
-  Move to left 
-  Center 
-  Move up
-  Move down
-  Flush left
-  Flush right
-  Align horizontally
-  Align vertically
-  Break, start new line
-  New paragraph
-  No new paragraph
-  run on
-  flush P  No paragraph indentation
-  Transpose letters words or

\*\* From <http://www.printingtips.com/printing-tips/t-5-10/proofreading-marks.asp>. Permission granted by Tecstra Systems Inc., to link to the website and use the information. (A complete set of marks is available from the American National Standards Institute [ANSI], 2005, entitled, “Copy preparation and proof correction: Specification for typographic requirements, marks for copy preparation and proof correction, proofing procedure”. ANSI document #BS 5261-2:2005. \$146.00 at <http://webstore.ansi.org/RecordDetail.aspx?sku=BS+5261-2%3a2005> .)

