

There was a blog post recently on-line from an irate author who took offense when an agent suggested she hire an editor to work through her manuscript before she submitted it again. Obviously this post came from a place of pain. We all hope when we submit our story, that the next step will be something wonderful. A rejection can either be a learning experience or we can get on our high horse like this author did and scream about it to the world. Sorry, but you don't sell books from up there, honey. Climb down and take a breath. This author had the mistaken notion that if she told a good enough story, that was all she needed to do to be scooped up by an agent or publishing house. Wrong.

Let's be clear here. Agents and editors are busy people. They get hundreds, maybe thousands of manuscripts across their desks each month. They're looking for tiny gold nuggets in a pile of gravel. Put yourself in their places. Would you spend a few minutes of your precious time trying to figure out what an author meant when the first few pages are riddled with errors? Oh, wait, you say. I have spell check. Grammar check too. Of course you do. But we all know that a computer program isn't infallible. That wavy red, blue or green line means you've done something wrong. Then it's up to you to decide how to do the job or if you want to fix it at all. Maybe you always ignore the green. Run-on sentences and fragments are your "style". You let the computer take care of the spelling. Oops. Are you sure it's helping you?

Need an example? Here's one: Tessa was a sucker for a sail. Okay. Maybe your heroine is a boater. Then that sentence is fine. But what if she's a shopaholic? Hates the water and would never in a million years get near a boat. Then that sail is wrong. It should read: Tessa was a sucker for a sale. See what I mean? The editor is exasperated but hasn't given up on you yet. Then she gets a sentence like this: Tessa loved to shop almost as she loved to dance and pick up good looking men at the local bar when she'd met Joe who was clearly the best looking guy in the neighborhood and that included all of the east side of manhattan, maybe the Bronx too.

Can you find all the mistakes in that one? I left out “much” after “as”. That’s one. This sentence needs some punctuation. Stop it after bar. Then start a new sentence. That’s where not when she’d met Joe, who was clearly the best looking guy in the neighborhood. Forget the “and”. Start another sentence. That included Manhattan(my computer didn’t capitalize manhattan and I wonder why), maybe the Bronx too. My computer did capitalize Bronx for me. Interesting. Now you’ll notice I use a lot of fragments, pieces of sentences. Yes, they have wavy green lines under them on my computer. That’s my style. Frankly, an editor will put up with fragments more readily than long run-ons. It’s just easier to read them.

Notice I start a new paragraph randomly. That’s me. Because editors like lots of white space and I give it to them. The old rules about when to paragraph don’t interest me. What editors want definitely does.

What do you do if you have trouble with spelling, punctuation and grammar? That’s a tough situation. You can take courses in English, but I’m here to tell you it would be easier and faster to hire someone who has a good eye for errors than to learn grammar, etc., late in life. Ask other authors for editor recommendations. On-line loops are a great place for this. No, free-lance editors aren’t cheap. Consider it an investment in your career. I guarantee you will not sell a book, no matter how original the concept or clever the story, if the editor doesn’t see a professional product at first glance. Maybe you really are on a budget. A great critique partner might be your answer. Just be sure you are bringing something equally valuable to the table, like a good eye for story.

Still not on board? Yes, your manuscript will go through copy edits after it is bought and edited by the acquiring editor. I have a Master’s Degree in English and I still make mistakes as you can see from this article. I honestly don’t get that excited about the exact placement of a comma. I have some bad habits, like using what’s called a comma splice instead of writing two separate sentences. Those are the kinds of things a copy editor fixes. Plus I have a long running

series and I'm blessed with a copy editor who makes sure I am consistent with things like hair color, personality traits and my paranormal world's rules. I LOVE my copy editor. She is not the same person who bought my book, read through it after I first submitted it, and suggested changes to the story. She is someone with an eagle eye that goes through the final draft to fix the spelling, grammar and any inconsistencies I might have missed. That's all.

So here's the bottom line: You must turn in a very polished product if you want an editor or agent to take notice. If an agent suggests you need an editor to work on your story, it's a good sign. Obviously he or she saw potential in your writing, enough to think that, if it were cleaned up, it might be saleable. Now do you see why you need to know your craft? Get busy.

Gerry Bartlett taught school for way too many years before she could write full time. Check out her latest book, *REAL VAMPIRES KNOW HIPS HAPPEN*, on shelves now from Berkley Publishing and hit her website, [gerrybartlett.com](http://gerrybartlett.com), for more Perils articles.