
The Art of Collaboration

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Introduction

Author collaboration with editors is a creative endeavour. It can be inspiring, amazing and challenging. If you get it right, not only can the result be a thing of beauty, but you can celebrate the partnership shared in creating it.

Sound them out

When you're looking for an editor to partner with, the first step is to sound each other out.

A good way to do this is to check out their website, social media and the work they've done. If they've written anything, be sure to find and read it. Also, check their training and client testimonials.

Be involved

It's good to make yourself available to discuss the project and be prepared to answer queries about it.

Please don't ghost if they send back some initial questions, it's part of the process: the editor will want to

know about your needs, but also about any background or other details to the project that may be relevant. If it's obvious from the outset that the proposal isn't suitable for you both to take forward together, that's totally fine and the purpose of exploratory contact.

Still, the editor could still be a valuable addition to your contacts book, even if you aren't able to work together right now. You never know if you might need each other in future for something else, so unless you're sure you want to close the door, consider keeping it open.

Be prepared to talk – and listen

Personalities are a crucial element in collaboration. During your first contact – whether over the phone, video, email or in person – take the emotional temperature to see if a genuinely productive connection might be possible between you.

Look out for the following. Is your potential editor:

- open
- willing to discuss ideas
- considerate
- flexible and accommodating
- empathic

- positive
- affable, pleasant
- a good communicator
- respectful
- keen to pitch in and share responsibility?

Above all, are they listening to you? Do you like them?

Trust your gut

Often the clues to the demise of a relationship are there, right at the beginning. Trust your gut: if it's telling you the fit isn't right or there's something 'off' about the situation, do heed it.

After the initial discussion or meeting, check in with yourself. Reflect on the following.

- Did I get a good feeling from this exchange?
- Is the relationship likely to be a pairing of equals?
- Can we play to each other's strengths and be supportive of each other?
- Are we willing to be guided by each other at times?
- Do we seem to understand each other?

- Do we see things in the same way? If not, is that still workable and okay?
- Do I feel they'll show up in the process – will they be there?

Commit to quality

No creative worth their salt wants to put out poor work: it's as simple as that. It's especially key for authors, because your name is on the byline or cover and readers will judge what's behind it!

To be on the same page as your editor, be sure you're willing to have standards – and that your idea of what constitutes those standards actually matches.

Check the destination

Thinking over where a partnership is likely to go is really important. It's worth considering your body of work: if you're planning more content or books, look at where this collaboration may take you further down the line.

Clarity is key

Having decided you'd like to work together, being clear

about what you both want to achieve is essential from the outset.

Without a properly delineated idea of what you want to produce – with a definite endpoint in sight, and a timeline to get there – the collaboration could suffer from confusion and scope creep. Worst-case scenario, it could stall and never be realised.

Establish the goal

Establishing the goal, its parameters and knowing how you're going to achieve them, will help you and your editor stay focused.

There are numerous examples of creatives who've taken months – years, even – to make work with terrible results because of personality clashes, chaotic behaviour and beleaguered organisation.

Don't let this be you. Decide what you both want to do, commit to it, and stay on track.

Every creative has their own process, their own way of working. In collaboration, you and your editor will contribute in different ways. Mutual understanding will

help bring your individual approaches and methods together in a cohesive whole.

This is where the emotional intelligence I encouraged you to look for in your first meeting comes in – in both your editor and yourself.

Give-and-take and appreciation for the thought and care that goes into creative process – as well as consideration for the experience and expertise that informs and guides it – is the level to look for and work to.

Comment and critique are okay

Respectful comment and critique are okay; negativity or frustration because someone else is simply doing something differently to the way we'd do it ourselves is not.

Here, sensitive communication is your ally. Remember that you're both bringing something unique to this partnership: that's what's so special about it. The result of what you're producing together is a blend of both your originalities: it can't be made by anyone else.

Keep the lines open and give each other the space to do what you need to, but share and keep talking so you both know where you are at each stage.

Be prepared to disagree at times, but be sure that any divergence in views is in service of the project, not ego, and don't allow it to escalate into conflict. If the collaboration is good and strong enough, it'll be able to withstand passing difference of opinion without turning it into a dealbreaker.

That said, don't put up with any unacceptable behaviour – set boundaries if you have to – but do be aware of your own foibles too, and be willing to meet your collaborator halfway if genuine issues do come up.

Check your supplies

As I mentioned, disorganisation over practical matters really can bedevil a project. No good traveller sets out on a journey without checking their supplies – and creative work is no different.

Taking a work to the public is like any other project that needs to be managed. Here are some things you'll need to discuss with your editor.

Personnel:

- Who is going to work on this project?
- How will it work in practice?
- Who is going to manage it?
- What do they need?

Funding:

- Money – where is it coming from?
- What's the budget, and how will it be used?
- What is the cost of time and expertise needed to do this work?

Timeline:

- Set up a project schedule.
- Work out each stage for completion of work and any other tasks to be completed.
- Factor in contingency for absence, delays, illness and unexpected events.

As this guide has outlined, there are quite a lot of things to think about when collaborating with others, but it needn't be too complicated.

If everyone can enter into it in good spirit, create a space for inspiration and skill to flourish, and facilitate safe and supportive rapport, it can be a real and happy success!

If you've found the advice in this booklet useful and would like more information or assistance with your project, contact me:

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