

*So, you just do a spell check, add some pictures, and publish it, right?*



Sure. That's exactly it. We like to keep things simple.

But as with everyone's work, there is a lot going on behind the scenes. So, let's just imagine, there's more to publishing. [Cue spooky electronic music]

I know! What sorcery is this?

Well, in all forms of publishing, content is commissioned or submitted, copy-edited, reviewed, translated, designed and proofread. These processes are overseen by a team of wizards...sorry, I mean pre-editors, copy editors, proofreaders, designers and translators.

Apart from the obvious exception of graphic design, this work takes place behind the scenes and is almost invisible to those not looking for it. And we are kind of, well, fine with that. It is the story or message that is important, the work of the editorial team merely facilitates how that story is told.

But we do take our role very seriously. Before a book is launched, an article is published, a speech is delivered, or a decision or resolution is adopted, a dedicated team or nerds (like us) is involved behind the scenes to improve its readability, detect errors (substantive and minor), choose the correct translations and avoid potential misunderstandings or legal issues. (Think of anchorman Ron Burgundy assembling his news team and replace it with '[Editorial team assemble!](#)' for every piece of content just described.) Everything, down to the user guide for your printer and advertising copy has been subject to some form of editorial oversight. Although, as illustrated in this Bored Panda [article](#), some could have done with a smidge more rigorous review.

We labour over em dashes (—) and en dashes (–), wake up in a cold sweat over how to spell [Kyrgyzstan](#), argue over whether something should be hyphenated or not, and how best to translate ‘after-action review’. In her book, [A World without Whom](#), Emmy J. Favilla sums this up perfectly: ‘Another thing your teachers didn’t tell you is that one day, arguments over [capitalisation] ... would constitute half your workday and lead to severed ties with many people you once considered close friends or family’. More Club Neurotica than Club Tropicana.

## But if nobody sees it, why do it?

Well, the reason you’re not as neurotic as we are – you’re welcome – is *because* we do this work before you see it. You are spared the missing citations, confusing grammar, typos, poor-quality images, agonies over word choice and the circuitous sentences.

Like that great philosopher with an aversion for green eggs and ham, and foxes in boxes once wrote:

***‘So the writer who breeds  
more words than he needs  
is making a chore  
for the reader who reads.’***

‘A Short Condensed Poem in Praise of Reader’s Digest Condensed Books’ by Theodore Geisel (Dr Seuss)

And the good doctor was on to something. Our brains do not enjoy circuitous sentences. One [study](#) indicated that the time we take to process complex sentences increases by a factor of 10 when compared with simple sentences. In my case, this factor may be 100. I cannot tell you how many texts I have read and re-read over the years that have caused me to stop at the same point each time musing ‘[What’s that Lassie?](#)’ The meaning of this paragraph is trapped down a well! Where Lassie? Where? Tell us!

While I have never been quite this bad, I have to say I did laugh a bit too hard at an episode of *Black Books*, where the protagonist when trying to complete his tax return for the umpteenth time, shouts at the form, ‘[What does it mean?](#)’

One day soon, dear reader, with the ‘secrets’ of publishing fresh in your mind, you might read something and think, ‘Why did no one edit this?’ Or you may not think of the team behind the scenes at all, and that’s alright by us. It means we have done our jobs.

*We wish to thank our news team member Lucy Hogan for writing this article for the OIE In-house Times.*

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