In Depth

HOW TO FIND AND KEEP NONNATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS AS CLIENTS
by Katharine O'Moore-Klopf, ELS

Academic publishing in the United States has long been fueled by the publish-or-perish imperative. Now researchers around the world, especially those in Asia, are affected by that imperative and are producing a great many reports for submission to peer-reviewed English-language journals. And guess who gets to edit them: you do, if you've made your own luck.

If you have the patience, persistence, and proper manuscript-side manner, you can cultivate a large clientele of researchers from all over the world who are nonnative English speakers. They need your editing because they must **get their articles published** in English-language US and UK journals to secure tenure, promotions, and even, in some cases, housing. A large portion of my clientele consists of about 60 physician-researchers from 20 nations. I do substantive editing of their articles, which collectively have gone on to be accepted for publication by 35 English-language biomedical journals. I find it rewarding to work with these clients, first because their research is fascinating and second because they are often effusively grateful for my editorial assistance. These authors, not the journals that they submit their articles to, pay me for my editing.

I fell into English as a second language (ESL) editing—sometimes called English as a foreign language editing—by accident. Before I began freelancing full time, my last in-house job was as a production editor for a medical publisher. The longer I held that job, the more often I was given the most difficult manuscripts to edit: those written by nonnative English speakers. I had become known as the editor with a talent for finding the intended meaning behind the stilted syntax. Once I began freelancing, that medical publisher began referring many of its ESL authors to me because the in-house staff members just didn't have the time to do the substantive editing that those authors' manuscripts needed. As those authors realized the value of my editing, they began referring their colleagues to me. And those colleagues went on to refer their colleagues to me. And because, for transparency's sake, I require my ESL authors to note in their articles' acknowledgment section that I conducted professional English-language editing for them, the journals that publish those edited articles became aware of my skills and referred even more ESL authors to me.

HOW TO FIND ESL AUTHORS
But what if there's no one to send ESL authors your way?

First, note on your business website, in your resumé, in online profession-related directories where you have an entry, in your LinkedIn profile, on your business blog, and everywhere else online where you have a professional presence that you specialize in ESL editing, and explain what that is. Add it to your signature for posts to profession-related e-mail lists so that colleagues will think of you when one of their clients needs a referral.

Second, hang out where these authors are likely to be. For example, if you like working with university students who need ESL editing, contact university department heads and let them know that your services are available and that you'll abide by university regulations on editing students' work. Contact universities' international student organizations and ask if they will post your contact information and a description of your services on their website or their page of the university website. If you want to work with researchers who need ESL editing to get their journal articles published, contact professional organizations that deal with subject matters you like to edit and ask them to make your contact information and services description available to their members.

When I contact the editors-in-chief of journals whose subject matter I feel comfortable working with, I let them know that I know that ESL authors are doing great research but that because of budget and schedule limitations, the journals' staff members likely can't spend the necessary time to heavily edit these authors' manuscripts. I add that I work directly with authors and would be pleased if the editor-in-chief would consider referring promising ESL authors to me. The editors-in-chief are often happy to do this for me because I make their jobs—and the jobs of their editorial staff members—easier by taking the substantive editing off their hands.

Third, as you gain ESL clients, those who are pleased with your work will be happy to tell others about your services. Make it clear in your communications, especially written ones, that you'll gladly accept referrals. You can even put a note to that effect at the bottom of your invoices or your payment receipts. When you finish a project for an ESL client, be sure to mention that you'll be available for editing additional materials from that person in the future. E-mail these clients periodically to say hello, and remind them that you enjoyed working with them and would like to work with them again.

HOW TO KEEP ESL AUTHORS AS CLIENTS
What freelancer doesn't want repeat clients? If you find that you enjoy working with ESL

authors, you can take steps to make them want to keep returning to you for editing. Creating a good working relationship is important with all clients, but with clients whose second or third language is English, it's all about your working relationship with them. Not only must these authors do research and then write about it, but they also must either write in a language in which they're not fluent or write in their native language and then have their writing translated. Then they must deal with a copyeditor who may not speak their language and whose culture they may not understand. So take these steps to ease the editing process for them and help them feel that you're on their side.

Communicate with authors by e-mail rather than by phone. They can review your written communication with them as many times as necessary to fully comprehend it. That isn't possible when you communicate by phone.

Be easy to reach. Some nations' governments restrict their citizens' access to some websites, domains, and Internet service providers. Authors in those nations may suddenly be unable to receive messages from your domain-related business e-mail account. Because of that, make sure that the first time you correspond with new authors, you give them two e-mail addresses: your main business address and a free webmail address.

Use easy-to-understand language every time you communicate with your authors. Break up complex and compound sentences into easier-to-digest portions. Avoid using idioms and contractions; many idioms don't translate well, and not all languages use contractions. Although ESL authors are proficient enough in English to understand much of what you write, they may not understand a native English speaker's elisions and allusions.

Explain everything. Spell out your working process and how and when authors will pay you. Lay out what times you are available for consultation, how many rounds of editing you will do, how long you expect editing to take, how you want them to respond to your queries, and what your responsibilities are versus theirs in the editing process. If you have to use publishing terms, such as callout, explain what those terms mean.

Avoid promising that your editing will work miracles. You can't guarantee that your authors' work will be published just because you edited it. The first time that we work together, I tell my ESL authors that my editing doesn't guarantee that their article will be accepted by a journal. Journal editors base their decisions on content and other concerns. I explain that my editing

can make their writing flow smoothly and follow the conventions of their target journals, which can help with acceptance.

Be respectful at all times. Some ESL authors may feel at a disadvantage because they must deal with a system that doesn't speak their first language, so put them at ease by being extra careful to convey your high regard for their work. This is easy to do in the tone you take in your e-mails and queries. There is no such thing as saying please or thank you too often. Never come across as condescending or lecturing when discussing problem areas in manuscripts.

Suggest fixes rather than just asking authors to clarify muddy sentences. This gives authors a better understanding of the problems that you are seeing.

Be transparent. Top-quality editing is built on frank, open communication. In some cultures, being direct is sometimes seen as being impolite, so your authors may not bring up some of their concerns. But if you are straightforward, you tacitly give your authors permission to be straightforward with you.

Thank your authors for the privilege of working with them. I take every chance I can find to let my authors know that I value being able to read about their research, which helps them feel that I am on their side.

Be an ambassador for your nation's publishing industry. Offer to explain any publishing processes or conventions that you're familiar with but that may differ from those in your authors' nations or cultures. Being helpful in this manner is one more way to show that you are on your authors' side. Your authors will demonstrate their gratitude by coming back to you with their next research article or chapter for a multi-author book.

Endear yourself to your authors by speaking their languages. You don't have to be fluent in their languages, but you can convey information that you must often provide to authors—about the editing process, how to review your edits, or how to pay your invoices—in their languages. For example, I wrote a one-page explanation of how I want my authors to review my edits. I paid professionals to translate that explanation into eight languages. The cost, spread out over time, wasn't large; it was a tax-deductible business expense. Most important, though, is that my authors realize that I care enough about them to make it easy for them to understand my instructions. I plan to commission translations in additional languages as the need arises.

Learn about your authors' cultures and show appreciation for them. Authors are likely to ask for your services again if you're a good editor, but they will rush to work with you again if you

show that you value them as people and not only as sources of income. I have researched the major holidays in my clients' cultures. On each holiday, I e-mail them good wishes and thank them once again for the privilege of working with them.

Engage in a little small talk from time to time. If your authors mention an award or promotion that they have received, congratulate them. If you come across an article in their field that you think they might find interesting, share it with them. Ask your authors to let you know when the articles or book chapters that you edit for them have been published. Let them know that you ask because you want to be able to congratulate them on their successes—and then follow through.

Keep your authors posted about your work schedule. When I'm going to be away at a business conference or on vacation, I e-mail my authors ahead of time to let them know. This allows them to plan ahead for their editing needs. And it often prompts authors whom I haven't worked with in a few months to e-mail me with offers of new projects.

Wrap up the year with thanks. At the end of each year, I snail-mail a "Happy New Year" card to each of my authors, enclosing some of my business cards, wishing them a healthy and prosperous new year, and thanking them for working with me in the preceding year. They love this, and many have referred their colleagues to me immediately after receiving those greeting cards. I send KOK Edit coffee/tea cups to the authors I work with most frequently.

RESOURCES ON WORKING WITH ESL AUTHORS

Here are some good resources with additional tips on working with ESL authors:

- ▶ **"Bridging the Gap: Working Productively with ESL Authors"**
- ▶ **"Understanding the Challenges of Non–English-Speaking Authors"**
- ▶ **"The Editor as Translator (or: How Do You Say That in Calculus?)"**
- ▶ **"Editing English Content for Non-English Readers"**

*Katharine O'Moore-Klopf of KOK Edit has worked in publishing since 1984. In January, she will celebrate 17 years as a freelance copyeditor. As a **board-certified editor** in the life sciences and a medical copyeditor with an ESL specialty, she has helped researchers in more than 20 nations get their articles published in 35 US and UK biomedical journals by removing language barriers. She is also the creator and curator of the **Copyeditors' Knowledge Base**.* ∎