

Tuesday 10:30 - noon - Manuscript Solutions (90 minutes)

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Overview of the session - Decisions about manuscript length, tone, voice and focus need to be made before you can start detailed editing. Manuscript solutions are the first step in a quality article.

We have already talked about leading the process of your magazine, the big idea of your magazine, developing writers for your magazine. We have several workshops that deal with the details of editing - leads, conclusions, presenting the material, editing the article. And there will be some topics and ideas that overlap between these sessions - and Camerin and Jeremy and I might have slightly different ways to approach the editorial process - but this is the core of what it means to edit your magazine.

As you edit the articles for your magazine - you will go through them several times, to hone the message and content and exact details.

For this particular session on manuscript solutions - we are going to think about the first time through the article - this is an article that you have already decided belongs in your magazine or digital newsletter or website or curriculum. So you've decided it is in. Now what?

For any article - you have to start with the big decisions first - there is not point correcting punctuation and grammar on sections that are going to change - so let's talk about the big decisions you need to make with an article.

As we approach manuscript solutions - it always helps to keep the big idea in mind. You want excellent content that fulfills the mission and vision of your magazine - in every single article. You are heading toward a final article that sounds like it belongs in your magazine - in the body of ideas that you present. An article that will move the reader forward in some way - information, inspiration, whatever you have decided is your purpose for the magazine. An article that incorporates the style that your magazine is known for.

Style (in addition to what is in manual)

- **The first step in considering the manuscript is where it fits into the whole magazine.** Your magazine will have a certain style for different sections of the magazine - what is the reader expecting, what is the best way to tell this story or communicate this information. However the manuscript came in might not be exactly how you want it to go forward.

Some of these decisions are obvious - if you always have an author interview - then that particular article is interview style. But for feature articles or general articles - how do you decide the structure of the article? Should it be first person, someone narrating their own story? Should it be third person? Does it need more quotes from different people to flesh out the big idea?

Even an excellent article will require some editing - this is because YOU as the editor know the content in the whole magazine (or website/digital newsletter). Each individual writer, when they submit an article, doesn't see the whole picture. When you made an article assignment to a writer, perhaps you gave specific directions on voice and big idea, but still, how you craft

the article from here, is based on your understanding of the whole in a way that an individual author cannot see.

Looking back at author assignments that Jeremy talked about yesterday, they should be getting style close based on your instructions. But often articles come from general submissions or other sources, not specific assignments. I have many articles that I get from prayer letters and the style needs an overhaul before you can get to detailed editing.

Too Long

For this particular step in the process, when we read an article and it is too long, I'm not talking about trimming a few words to get to an exact word count to fit in a space, that will come a bit later in the editorial process.

What I mean by too long at this first step of dealing with the manuscript is that it **covers too much material**. It also is too long in word count, but before we get to the details of making each word, sentence and paragraph essential, we need to think about the big picture of the article.

When you decide that an article is too long, it is usually because the **article needs more focus**. The author tried to cover too much material, so it is too broad. You need to focus the article on one main purpose - what do I want the reader to know and do after they read this article.

Before you start cutting out parts - step back, read through the whole article again, and ask yourself **what is essential**. You want to preserve the parts of the story that are key to taking the purpose forward. Sometimes I'll go through the article and just highlight parts I want to be sure to keep. Maybe it's because the description is rich or the words just sing. If I go to cutting too fast, I might cut something that was great in the original article. That's also why I always save the article under a new name (_updated or whatever) - I can go back and see if I cut something that should have been saved.

Sometimes an article is too long because it has **extra information** that is nice, but not core to the one big idea. If you have space the extra information is meaningful, you can pull it out to a sidebar, but sometimes the extra information is a whole other article.

I was working with an article about a men's discipleship group - the leader had gathered men who weren't used to studying the Bible, memorizing verses, and praying together. These men had been on periphery of the church and hadn't been engaged in the daily process of living out their faith in Jesus. The process of growing as followers of Jesus had changed their whole lives - the way they approached their families and marriage and the way they approached their work. Then there were lots of examples. I had to decide which one of several core messages was going to be the focus of the article. It was a short article - so I didn't have space to tell about both work and marriage - I had to decide the main focus and cut out content that was extra. I didn't have space to tell both stories - and both stories didn't belong in one article.

When you cut out content - realize that the 2nd focus might be a future article all on its own - keep what you cut - it might have another life somewhere else. But for the sake of clarity in one article - keep focused and don't go on too long.

Too General

Sometimes we are telling stories of great movements of God - dozens or even hundreds of people have decided to follow Jesus and are getting serious about studying the Bible and living for God. We have large numbers and big ideas in an article - but it isn't really about any one person. We get an overview, which may be appropriate for a certain type of article - maybe news of a revival or church growth.

But think about the story that will be memorable for the reader. Often the story of one changed life can be used to give a glimpse of a movement. Even in a story that is about big, broad topics - if you read through the article and haven't gotten the sense of what it is like for one person impacted, perhaps the article is too general. That doesn't mean you have to change everything in the article. But perhaps adding a few quotes or anecdotes that focus on individual people will give flesh and blood to the story. **Tell the story of many through the story of one, who can represent the many.**

The story of one changed life can be more memorable and relatable for the reader. Then they can absorb that this is a specific example of something much bigger that God is doing.

Too Thin (short or superficial)

An article that is too superficial is not memorable for the reader. When you read through the article and have no lasting impression, then the article might be what I would call too thin - too shallow or short.

In Disciple! magazine, we do have articles that are only 200 words. Our "field notes" are 200, 300 and 400 words. So you can have a very short article that is impactful - you don't need lots of words to make one compelling point. But an article that has no memorable point, is just a "so what" for the reader - it might be too thin.

In this type of article - look for a place you can add depth. Again - depth doesn't necessarily mean adding 200 words. But is there one aspect of the big idea that can be fleshed out more with a couple more sentences. That might mean you trim some other part to make it all fit - but even a short article can have a substantial thought.

Sometimes you will realize what is missing as you think about **questions the article raises** - if you read the article and wonder about one particular point - maybe - what happened next to that person? - that is the place that you can add some depth. **Answer the obvious question the reader has.**

If you don't have the luxury of a large word count to add context and depth - make sure that the other elements on the page are carrying the load. Sometimes you can **add a little more detail to a photo caption that adds more to the story**, rather than just identifying people. That's a great way to add more context and content, without many words - and photo captions can sometimes be just phrases, not complete sentences.

(Skipping some of the Word Choice - more detailed editing in this part, useful info is in the manual)

Tone

Is the article written in a negative tone - about everything that is wrong or bad. Certainly there is a place for prophetic words of warning and bad news. But an overly negative article might not be memorable for a reader. We all want good news! Is there a way to say something in a positive light rather than all negative?

Sometimes the idea of tone is more prevalent in marketing writing - but there is a reason for that - people respond to hope and positive messages.

My daughter works with a Christian aid organization on the US/Mexico border and deals with immigration issues. She was asking me for some advice on social media campaigns that are effective. I looked for examples in the area of human trafficking, because that is an area where people have grown in their understanding and response over the last 5 years. I found that IJM, International Justice Mission, had very positive messages, even when they were dealing with very hard topics - human slavery and trafficking. They would show a young person happy to be going to school - and the message was that this person who was rescued from human slavery could now attend school. We want hope - so is there a way we can **incorporate hope, even in a hard story?** The tone can make it more memorable for the reader. Angry doesn't attract.

Now, if you are writing a news article about a hard topic, you need to **honest in your tone**. So I would say watch your tone - and make a conscious decision. But if an article is sounding very negative, is there a way to add some hope?

Assumptions about readers' knowledge

How much do your readers know about the topic? This is a bit tricky to balance - you have to decide how meaty to go on a topic without missing basic, foundational information. I talked about reader's panels and reader's feedback - this is a place where knowing your audience is important.

For example, if you have spiritual growth articles - **how much do you assume that people know about studying the Bible** or other biblical principles?

This can be true even of Christian concepts that some of us might think are well known. I had just read some research on how knowledgeable Christians in the US are about certain Christian terms, and I had noticed that the term "Great Commission" isn't one that Christians necessarily understand and know. So when I was editing an article that included that phrase, I added a parenthetical statement (Jesus' exhortation to his disciples in Matthew 28).

This is where digital articles can really shine - if you are working on a **digital platform - you can have links embedded in your articles to go for more information** for many particular topics. When you are working on a digital article - think about ways to deepen the knowledge of your reader and how to include meaningful links. You do want to make sure you set the links to open in a new window, so they don't fall out of your article - but a digital platform gives you a great way to add to your readers' knowledge without sacrificing meatier content.

Audience Focus

In this session we are talking about articles that you have decided to include in your magazine, so there was a reason you decided to include this article and now you are working on making it the best it can be. So the article does hit some target audience of your magazine.

Sometimes an article subtly addresses a sub-category of your audience and can make other parts of your audience **feel left out**. For example, if you have an article on small group discipleship, are all the examples in your article married people? There are single people in the church, so perhaps you can change the audience focus by changing one example to include people who might feel left out. The same thing can happen to families with children. Not everyone has children. Does the writer of the article assume everyone has children? Is there a simple way to **make the audience more inclusive**?

When I worked on a mothering magazine, it was very easy to slip into assumptions that everyone in the audience was married and had biological children. We had to keep our audience focus on *every mother* - that included single mothers, mothers who had adopted children, step-families.

Also - this is an area where you can creep into token inclusion. Thinking that if I've checked all the category boxes, my article is inclusive. That's not what I intend in this point. As a sidenote, I would say one great way to get around that kind of token inclusion is to make sure you have a **variety of voices** and writers. And don't always make someone a "spokesperson" for a group. For example, having a single mom write an article that isn't just about single parenting, but about some parenting principle, illustrates that she is a core to your audience and voice, not just a check mark.

There are areas other than demographics where this applies - For example - do you include different Christian traditions - if you say that your magazine has a broad denominational reach - do your articles reflect that broad reach, or do you tend to focus on one particular segment of the audience?

- This part is not in the manual

Check Voice

We are going to spend more time on voice than on the previous topics - and do a few examples on this. In my outline I had originally called this "wrong voice" - but I realized it isn't a right or wrong issue as you are looking at manuscript solutions - but it is a conscious decision. An article comes in a certain way - but is that **the best voice for telling the particular story**.

- **Voice**

What voice should I use for this article? First person, or third person?

First person narrative means writing from the "I" point of view. ...

Third person narrative form is writing from the omniscient point of view. Here, you use the he-she form. As in: He led a Bible study. She mentored younger women. James told Thomas that he wanted to learn how to share his story with other people.

Within a third person narrative story, you might still have direct quotes from various people, but the overall tone is telling ABOUT something, rather than the first person, which is **directly telling** a story.

Here's an example of changing the voice from 3rd person to 1st person. (powepoint, 2017 week2)

Tim - had been on a missions trip - this is just the first paragraph of the article:

3rd person:

- ▶ *Going on a short-term missions trip is a great way to serve and grow as a disciple. Tim had been on several mission trips, and during a trip to El Salvador he had felt particularly used by God and didn't want to lose that experience of impact. As he returned home, he felt like God was telling him that there was work for him to do at home. ...*

1st person:

- ▶ *Going on a short-term missions trip is a great way to serve and grow in our relationship with Christ. I have been on several mission trips and have been stretched through the experience. On a trip to El Salvador I felt God working in and through our team—when I returned home I didn't want to lose that experience of living a missional life full of impact. That mission trip was life-changing for me. ...*

This article was originally in the 3rd person. In our first round of editorial review process, one of the reviewers felt like the 3rd person version felt distant and not as compelling - so we switched it to 1st person.

And I have to say, as I was re-reading this for the slides, I wanted to change the 1st sentence because it isn't a great hook - but I left it as we had it (For truth in teaching) - we will be talking about that detailed editing in another workshop.

But beyond the 1st sentence, hearing Tim describe his own experience makes it more compelling - we used the 1st person article.

Also - Tim didn't actually write this article - This article was written based on a phone interview with Tim. Then we had him read and approve the content prior to finalizing the magazine.

You can write in first person - as long as the person approves the article - and supplies enough words and context to write the article, whether you are writing the article, or there is some other author.

Testimony articles/stories are often first person, that creates a compelling voice for the reader to get close to the person who is sharing.

But first person isn't always the best choice for a testimony article. Sometimes a third person story will capture a number of voices and people.

Even if we don't present the article in the first person - if we do a 3rd person story - you might want to include someone's direct voice - some direct quotes from a person or people in the article - to flesh out the information and make it sound more personal.

Consistency in voice - can't go back and forth on voice - have to decide how you are going to write it - but you can experiment - if it is 3rd person - try out 1st person, see if it is more connective.

Voice to connect with reader - you want to include the reader without pointing a finger at them - this is from a blog post I was editing - the author was talking about her own sinful nature, and the way she included the reader felt too early, too strong - felt accusatory.

Example - unedited:

I fall SO short every day. What kind of follower of Christ am I, anyway? And you, what kind are you? Aren't we more wanderers than followers? How can God possibly want us?

The phrase - **And you, what kind are you?** felt accusatory - especially early in the piece. Often you want to make a personal point and then broaden the point to include the reader, but this can sound accusatory and off-putting.

Edited:

I fall SO short every day. What kind of follower of Christ am I, anyway? I feel more like a wanderer than a follower on so many days! How can God possibly want me?

Then LATER in the piece, expanded to WE to bring in reader.

Jesus is going to plant his Church, his very body through these scaly fishermen, and it begins here, with those words, **"I'm a sinful man!"**

That's **our** dark truth too. Don't **we** know our own black hearts? Then come on down, sister! Join this boatload of outlaws! **Seeing our sin makes us perfect for God.** But we can't stop there. We have to say **Yes** to the next part ...

However, in a discipleship article, it is often appropriate (depending on your organization style) - to move from 1st person singular (I) to we (1st person plural). But if you keep shifting voice back and forth, that is confusing.

You-focused content can be very connective with the reader, but it also can sound accusatory, so you have to read carefully and see how the voice sounds. Generally you-focus is useful in marketing and fund raising - the content is connecting personally to the felt-need of the reader.

We are going to move into a **specific example of taking a manuscript** that came with a variety of voices and think about how to solve the voice issue in this manuscript.

From Athiest to Christ Follower: Nate's story

This story came in to be used in a digital newsletter. The story had actually already been published in the form you see in your handout - on a ministry blog that doesn't have a wide circulation. We were going to use it on a digital newsletter with a very large circulation.

First of all - we selected this story because it is a compelling testimony, and it has some interesting little twists. Nate came to follow Jesus, after many years of struggling and avoiding God. But the interesting twists are that he met Lou and Patti several years previously, buying a

computer from them. Then he prayed to receive Jesus, sitting at his computer. Then later he met Lou again and was being disciplined by Lou.

All elements of a great article that you might want in your publication.

But when I first read the article I got lost, because the voice was changing everywhere - and it was hard to follow what was going on. Also - the headings were awkward - and I thought there would be a better way to present the story to incorporate the transitions into the flow instead of just saying who is talking now.

So - a great story, in need of a manuscript solution - particularly around voice.

Now - this can be a time consuming process. We are going to talk about the scheduling process in another workshop - **but this step of going through a manuscript for the big picture solutions is important - before you get to the finer details. If you spend lots of time on words and grammar before this step, you will have wasted some of that editing because you might be completely changing a section.** We have several more workshops on the finer points of editing - Camerin is doing leads/conclusions, presenting material, and more detailed editing, and Jeremy is doing a workshop particular to news writing/editing. This is the core of what we do as editors. **But the sequencing of these steps can make a big difference in your work flow** - make sure your process includes a step to look at big picture manuscript solutions before you get into the finer details. You have to make decisions about voice and scope before you can get to detailed editing. Otherwise, you keep back-tracking and re-doing work.

Practical Application:

- Do you have a specific step for big-picture manuscript changes before you get to detailed edits?
- How can you incorporate consideration of voice, focus and audience into your editorial cycle?
- Do you have some articles you can experiment with? Do you usually have 1st person and want to introduce some 3rd person articles? Or vice versa?