UNIT 8 EDITING FICTION AND NON-FICTION (PROSE AND POETRY)

Structure

8.0 Aims

8.1 Introduction

8.2 Need for Editing Fiction Text Books

8.3 Need for Editing Poetry Text Books

8.4 Editing Fiction Text Books

8.5 Editing Poetry Text Books

8.6 Importance of Editing Fiction Text Books

8.7 Importance of Editing Poetry Text Books

8.8 Summing up

8.9 Aids to Answer

8.10 For Further Readings

8.0 AIMS

In this unit, we shall tell you about the editing of Fiction and Poetry text books.

On completion of this unit, you will be able to

- Recognize the need for editing fiction text books.
- Assess the need for editing fiction and poetry text books.
- Explain the method of editing fiction and poetry text books.
- Judge the level of editing fiction and poetry text books.
- State the importance of editing fiction and poetry text books.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Every kind of book needs editing. Without editing, a manuscript may have its raw strength and rugged beauty but it may also have irritating errors and factual mistakes. Editing helps in removing those avoidable errors and factual mistakes. It also results in a well produced book. In case of a textbook, the editing acquires still greater significance.

Editing of a Fiction Textbook is not merely a cosmetic exercise. It does not fiddle only with words and the punctuation marks. It is equally concerned with the content and the spirit of the text. It means that the editor of a Fiction Textbook operates at several levels.

Of course, the first level of the editor's concern is about words and sentence structures. Once the editor is satisfied that the language of the book has been given

proper editorial care, she/he turns her/his attention to the matter or the content of the narrative. If the editor finds that the author has expressed her/his prejudices against or biases for certain individuals or institutions and if she/he observes that certain wrong ideas are getting encouraging references, the editor has to root out such wrong-headed tendency and expression. The third level is the level of spirit. It means that the chosen text should be simple, straightforward and that it hints at better values of life. Moreover, the chosen text must lead to a sense of achievement and joy in the student's heart. There can be no learning without joy and the editor must look for that element of joy in learning through that fiction textbook.

This is a tall order for anyone who has to edit a Fiction Textbook. But this is not only desirable but also necessary.

As regards text books, the editor checks the manuscript closely to see that the text satisfies all the requirements of the syllabus. In certain subjects like Social Studies and History, the editor has to rigorously scrutinize the manuscript from the point of view of the local conditions and regional or religious sentiments. It is for the editor to ensure that the manuscript does not contain any material that is seditious or obscene. Similarly, there should be no defamatory reference to an individual or an institution or an organization. Every author has her/his prejudices, biases or pet theories which may get reflected in the manuscript; the editor has to carefully look for those elements and weed them out. Such points, noted by the editor, are sent to the author who, after some time, gets back to the editor with necessary corrections or with strong justification for the material objected to, by the editor. In many cases, in order to avoid unnecessary delay, the author and the editor work on a developing manuscript simultaneously. Thus, conflicts and differences are sorted out on the spot and the manuscript gets ready in time for printing.

Editing books of fiction and poetry requires a different kind of sensibility and sensitivity. In a book of fiction, its total length has to be seen from the student's point of view. The age group and the class of students for whom the book is intended, is an important factor to be considered by the editor. A novel which is a big hit in the age group, 14-16 years, will go over the heads of the students in the age group, 7-9 years. They may not even grasp in the content of the story. Similarly, if the simplified version of some famous novel, aimed that the age group, 7-9 years, is given to readers of the age group, 14-16 years, it will not be able to create any interest among the students of the senior age group. Therefore, the editor has to apply her/his mind to select the right text for students of a particular class or a definite age group.

While deciding about the age group, one has also to keep in mind the region, the state, the kind of society or communities from which the students would be reading that fiction book. The theme of the novel or story should not hurt the feelings and beliefs of the people of that area. Their culture and way of life should not be ridiculed or satirized in a way that humiliates a community or segment of the society. Similarly, there should be no character resembling some famous and widely respected individual of the community should be portrayed in shades of fun and contempt. The editor has to understand and appreciate the susceptibilities of all sections of the society from which the students will be reading that textbook.

The level of vocabulary has to be judged by the editor, keeping in mind the class and the age group for whom the book is being prepared. The sentence structure is also examined and if it is found that some sentences are very complicated, the editor gets them split into smaller and simpler sentences.

In the field of fiction and poetry, the question of copyright always comes up. The editor has to find out the authors and publishers who are holders of copyright for various selected writings.

The editor of a textbook has to do much more than merely edit the text. She/He decides upon the suitability of a particular textbook. But, generally, before taking a final decision, the editor gets in touch with the production department and the sales department. It is at this stage that a decision is taken regarding the number of copies to be printed. No publisher will like to print more copies of a book than what she/he can conveniently sell in a stipulated period of time.

Editing, by itself, is a challenging task. Editing of text books brings in a much greater responsibility. And editing of fiction and poetry text books demands another type of competence and perception.

8.2 NEED FOR EDITING FICTION (PROSE)

Creative writing or literature comprises poetry, drama, prose, fiction, biography, autobiography and many other genres. But fiction is the most popular branch of literature. It is read avidly by millions of people all over the world. Among the books sold in a year in any language, the share or the percentage of fiction books is highest. So far as the publishers are concerned, they are ever willing to consider publishing of a work of fiction. Even among the students, popularity of fiction remains undiminished.

But when a work of fiction is being considered to be prescribed as a textbook for a certain class, it requires editorial scrutiny from many angles. First of these requirements is, suitability of the theme of the book for that particular age group or class. For example, if the textbook is meant for class five of a primary school, you can not prescribe *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen or *Tom Jones* by Henry Fielding or *Godan* by Prem Chand or *Jhootha Sach* by Yashpal. Not that these novels are not important. On the contrary, they are among the greatest novels of the world. But being a great novel, does not automatically make it fit for becoming a textbook for class five students. The question of suitability of theme is of prime concern for the editor and the publisher. By that yardstick of judgement, none of these famous novels can be prescribed for class five. And still, if some higher authority is adamant to have one of them as a fiction textbook, the novel has to be suitably reduced in size and length. Moreover, the editor has to take drastic measures to cut out episodes and events not suitable for a student of class five. The vocabulary and syntax come under rigorous scrutiny and, wherever necessary, the linguistic changes are effected, to bring everything to the level of class five students.

Editing is concerned with the copyright position of the material used in preparing the textbook. In the manuscript, there may be a chapter or a whole book which is copyright material of an author or a publisher or an institution. If your editor is not careful about the copyright and some copyright material is used in a fiction textbook without proper permission, it may lead to litigation when the book is out in the market. The person or the publisher, who holds the copyright of the used material, may drag you to the court and ask the magistrate to impose a heavy penalty on you. In fact, she/he may refuse to sell the copyright to you or even to negotiate with you.

In a work of fiction, the editor should examine whether the imagination of the author, as reflected in the book, highlights the better values of life or not. As the name implies, a book of fiction deals with unreal and imaginary events and individuals. But if, by chance, a character in the book has some resemblance with any living person, the editor and the publisher may have to face legal action. Therefore, the editor has to take care of this aspect of the problem also. A good and experienced editor, while reading a fiction manuscript, can detect and locate such descriptions and characters, that may lead to unnecessary legal wrangles.

You know the power of the word. A powerful book can create a stir in the society

– for the better or for the worse. If the message of the book is positive, the society welcomes it with open arms. But, if the book gives out a negative and divisive signal, it may create anger and a sense of outrage among common people. In a textbook, there is no place for controversial matters. Students read a textbook for acquiring knowledge, not for getting negative and socially harmful ideas. An editor who can not keep such ideas out of the textbook, is no good as an editor.

In a fiction textbook, this problem can be more serious. The book will have several characters, with different traits and outlooks. As the story unfolds itself, the characters get involved in many strange events and say a lot of things to others, or about others. Some of those statements may not be in tune with the acceptable social norms. This is what the editor has to carefully read and judge whether any of those statements can be termed as objectionable. If so, they have to be kept out.

A fiction textbook, generally, presents a picture of the society or the struggles of an individual human being. In either case, a good number of characters belonging to different segments of the society are there. Some of them may belong to the so-called higher castes while many others may come from the lowest sections of the social spectrum. The very names of the lower castes are taken as terms of abuse and insult. If the author has, inadvertently, used such a caste-name in the book, the editor has to throw it out. Otherwise, when the book reaches the schools, there will be violent protests and the whole society may be in a state of turmoil. It may turn into a law and order situation. Any intelligent editor can foresee such an ugly scenario. For these sensitive matters, related to caste or religion, the publisher should also keep her/his eyes open. There is no point in blaming, later on, the editor or the author.

As you know, a fiction textbook is everybody's favourite. The student picks it up for reading, more often than other books. The student's parents also, occasionally, take it up for browsing. Even guests, if they see the student's books lying around, they pick up one of the books to see the kind of books the student has to read. The chosen book, generally, in such cases, is the fiction textbook.

That is why, a fiction textbook needs thorough and very strict editing.

Check Your Progress - I

1 What kind of books have the highest sales all over the world ?

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2 Can any of the great novels automatically become a textbook for any class ?

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8.3 NEED FOR EDITING POETRY TEXT BOOKS

Poetry, by its very nature, is different from fiction or prose. Inevitably, the need for editing a poetry textbook is also of a different kind. As you know, poetry is natural and spontaneous expression of human feelings and emotions. You will be surprised to know that most of the writers, of the past or the present, including the greatest of them, began as poets. Some of them keep on writing poetry throughout their life, while many others, after some time, switch over to genres like fiction or prose. Another remarkable fact of human history is that all literatures of the world started with poetry – great epics.

Thus, you see that poetry has a rich and glorious past. Even in modern times, there are more poets than writers belonging to other genres of literature in any language of the world. Of course, poetry does not sell as much. That is why, publishers are not very keen to publish books of poetry. But a poetry textbook is an altogether different matter. Every publisher knows that, once a book of poetry is prescribed as a textbook, its sale – sufficiently large and profitable – is almost guaranteed. So, you can understand that there is no dearth of publishers for poetry text books.

The need for editing poetry text books arises because every poem does not suit readers of every age or every taste. As you already know, poetry is a spontaneous expression of a feeling or an emotion. Poetry is not written for any particular group of readers or society. Therefore, when a book of poetry is to become a textbook, there is a great need for an editor who is capable of making that book fit for being studied by students of a particular class or readers of a certain age group.

Without proper editing, a poetry textbook may create many kinds of controversies. Someone may object to the difficulties of language encountered by students of a particular class. Another kind of objection can be about the subject-matter, which they may call too violent or brutal. It is possible that some people question the moral values expressed in the poems. And you know that there can be many more kinds of adverse criticism. A publisher will be in real trouble if something like that happens to the poetry textbook published by her/him. Hence, the first thing she/he would do is to appoint a competent editor who will treat the manuscript, according to acceptable norms and handle all related matters efficiently.

Poetry is written either in free verse or in the rhyme pattern. If it is a poem in free verse, the editor, first of all, has to convince herself/himself that it is really poetry. If the poetry is rhymed, the editor examines the rhyme pattern from beginning to end of the poem. Every poem, rhymed or unrhymed, comes under critical observation of the editor. Poetry, as you know, must have an inner rhythm; this inner rhythm is what really makes it a poem, as distinct from prose. In a poetry textbook, the editor makes sure that the manuscript consists of original poems. Only then, it will be enjoyable and useful for the students. The manuscript should be free from unnecessary details.

Check Your Progress -II

Q.1 What is poetry ?

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2 What kind of controversies may be created if a poetry textbook has not been properly edited ?

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8.4 EDITING FICTION TEXT BOOKS

We have been talking about the need for editing fiction text books. Now, let us understand how the editing is done.

As mentioned earlier, the first and foremost thing to be decided by the editor is whether the work of fiction under consideration, suits, in terms of the theme, students of the class for which it is to be prescribed. The thematic suitability can be viewed by focusing on elements like violence, moral values and social norms, as portrayed in the manuscript.

Of course, a book of fiction deals with a human story. It has one main character and many other minor characters, interacting with each other in different situations and changing conditions. These changes bring about a change in the behaviour of the characters also. Moreover, this change is not the same or similar for all the characters. Each one of them reacts to the situational change in a different manner. Depending upon their natural instincts and tendencies, they change for the better or worse. That is what creates interest for the reader. She/He goes on identifying herself/himself with a particular character and, as she/he moves on and on with the narrative, she/he becomes engrossed in the turn of events. Her/His keen curiosity regarding the ultimate fate of that character grips her/him. Therefore, any editorial slip that hurts her/his feelings or that makes her/his favourite character or a community group an object of ridicule or humiliation, is unacceptable to the reader. Suppose in the novel or the story, the reader's favourite character is abused in a vile manner or insulted with a caste name, it is bound to hurt the student's sentiment. In the case of a fiction textbook, this kind of editorial oversight can create an uproar against the book. The matter may not end in the classroom; it may take the form of an ugly agitation on the streets. And who will be blamed for that? Obviously, the editor of the fiction textbook.

Once the theme is okayed by the editor, the next item on her/his agenda will be the language of the manuscript. As you know, language is a vast ocean; every writer takes a dip in it and comes up with words of her/his choice. This selection of words to be used by an author is individual and personal. As we see that no two individuals are alike, or no two food preparations taste similar, in choice of language, too, every writer has her/his special kind of language.

As we know, words have immense power. This what we see and observe all around us. Those persons in the society who use right words on the right occasions, get along with others in a better way than those who do not have this 'word sense'. Such people use a wrong word and invite trouble for themselves. For example, if there is a crowd of disgruntled people or an agitated mob, it would be unwise to rebuke or scold them. They may become violent and go on a spree of damaging and destroying vehicles and properties around. Thus, you see that wrong use of

words may lead to a law and order situation. This proves in a negative way, the power of words.

There can be a different scenario. Someone is caught up in a gloomy situation. The misery is unbearable. She/He does not know what to do get away from that all-pervasive gloom and distress. Then, suddenly, some friend or a neighbour drops in and speaks a few words of consolation. The magic of words becomes effective. The words of consolation, if rightly chosen, bring about a remarkable change in the concern person. One, who was so unhappy and miserable a few minutes ago, is in a much better state of mind. The pain or sadness is a still there but it is no longer unbearable. The soothing words acted as a balm upon the wounded heart and the troubled mind. Does is not prove the power of words. A similar effect would have been there if the afflicted person had, by chance, picked up a book of the right kind which would pour relief over the hurt spirit of the individual.

Let us take another example to show the efficacy of the word. If one story is to be written by four writers independently, you will find that each one of them uses a slightly different kind of language. One writer may choose to use bombastic words all along, thereby creating distaste among the readers. Another writer may select gentle words which create a very soothing and calm impact on the readers. Any author who makes use of proper words in a sensitive and sensible manner is sure to be successful in creating a favourable impression upon the readers.

If the same story is to be written by four writers independently, you will find that each one of them uses a slightly different kind of language. Words are different and their use also varies from author to author. You will see a still more surprising fact that each one of the writers has her/his own style of constructing sentences. Some make very small sentences. Some others use medium-sized expressions. There are also some who prefer long-winded, serpentine constructions which make reading heavy and tiring.

Check Your Progress - III

1 What is the first and foremost matter to be decided by the editor ?

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2 How do authors use the language ?

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8.5 EDITING POETRY TEXT BOOKS

Editing poetry is never an easy task. When it is a question of editing a poetry textbook, the task becomes much more difficult.

The editor goes through all the poems with one thought in her/his mind. The thought is regarding the suitability of each poem for students of the class who will study it as a textbook. The cultural background of the poems has to be examined by the editor because poems carry a number of historical and mythological images and references. If the poem has the background of Indian culture, the students will have no problem with such references. For example, mention of Dronacharya or Hanuman or Ajanta or Taj Mahal does not need lengthy explanations. But, if the prescribed poem refers to Pythagoras or Jupiter or Thames, the students will require a lot of description and explanation.

It does not mean that only poems with Indian cultural background should be prescribed. For the sake of knowledge, poems with the background of other cultures can also be a part of the book. After all, education means acquiring of knowledge, and knowledge can not be limited to our own culture only. It should be ensured that the teacher is in a position to explain the references of other cultures. The book may also contain adequate footnotes and/or an appendix to explain such references.

In the field of vocabulary, the poet has more freedom than writers of fiction or prose. The poet may give a new meaning to an old-fashioned word or give a new twist to its meaning. The poet may coin new words also to give an expression to her/his feelings. The editor keeps all these things in her/his mind while editing a poetry textbook.

Check Your Progress - IV

1 What is the advantage of having a poem with the background of Indian culture ?

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2 Why should poems with the background of other cultures be prescribed ?

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8.6 IMPORTANCE OF EDITING FICTION TEXT BOOKS

The importance of editing is acknowledged universally. Without editing, it is difficult, if not impossible, to have a good book of any kind. Editing turns a manuscript into an excellent book for the people to read and enjoy.

However, a fiction textbook is a double-edged weapon; it cuts both ways. If it is according to the readers' expectation, it is given a warm welcome. It becomes the general talking point. It is recommended to others as a fine book. On the other hand, the book may cause conflicts, even violent protests if some terms or words are used in the book, which are considered derogatory or contemptuous for some person or a social figure or a section of the society. It all depends on the editing of a fiction textbook whether it will be welcomed and praised or opposed and hooted down.

Editing of a fiction textbook makes the book suitable for being studied by the students who are its target readership.

Check Your Progress - V

1. What is the importance of editing a fiction textbook ?

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2. What is the necessary quality of an editor of a fiction textbook ?

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8.7 IMPORTANCE OF EDITING POETRY TEXT BOOKS

Poetry is considered to be the most sensitive branch of literature. A poet uses the language in a very subtle manner, loading a common word with an uncommon meaning. What she/he wants to express in the poem is not something which can be said in a common style of using language. Since her/his idea has a dream-like quality, the language also has to be a conveyor of that dreamy feeling. Even when a poet is writing about a real person or an actual event, the poet's description will be very different from what a fiction writer or a prose writer would have written.

In editing poetry, the skill of an editor is on test. She/He has to prove that she/he

can get into the spirit of the poet and, at the same time, use the editor's prerogative to make suitable changes in the text, from the point of view of the students who will be reading that poetry textbook. The editor ought to know what will please the readers as well as what may create problems for them. She/He tries her/his utmost to keep the pleasure of reading a poem intact while minimizing the problems, whatever they might be.

In this way, editing finally decides in what form the poems will appear in a poetry textbook.

Check Your Progress - VI

1 Which branch of literature is known as being very sensitive?

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2 How does an editor prove that she/he has the skill for editing a poetry textbook?

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8.8 SUMMING UP

Textbook publishing is a profitable business. Once a book is prescribed as a textbook, it assures the publisher that her/his book will have a fairly large sale, depending upon the number of students reading in that class. The number may vary, from class to class, from state to state. If a fiction or poetry textbook is prescribed for class five of a state, the print order of the prescribed book may be in thousands. The publisher gets a good profit by publishing such a textbook. At the same time, if a fiction or poetry textbook is prescribed for the Board Examination of some state, the print order runs into lakhs. As you can understand, the publisher of such a fiction or poetry textbook will have a huge profit out of that single book.

Book Publishing is a business and the publisher is a businessman. In the case of textbook publishing, sale is not much of a problem for the publisher. But, she/he has to face a challenge greater than sale; that challenge is editing. Editing of a fiction textbook is a major responsibility. It is a tough task. Everyone can not do it. For editing a fiction textbook, you need someone who has a vast knowledge of fiction and its various implications when it comes out as a textbook. Such a capable editor can do full justice to her/his position and responsibility. Editing of a fiction textbook needs a lot of care and caution on the part of the editor to make the book presentable and pleasant.

When we consider the case of a poetry textbook, it brings in many aspects of editorial competence and skill. The language of poetry is more subtle and illusive than the language used by the writer of fiction or prose. Consequently, the editor of a poetry textbook must have an ability of perceiving those delicate nuances of language which give the poetry the high status it enjoys in the realm of literature. The editor of a poetry textbook ought to be a sensitive reader, imbued with the finer sensibilities of a perceptive critic. The editor of a poetry textbook has to be almost as sensitive as the poet, so that she/he can enter the layers of meanings hidden in all good poems.

One can say with confidence that editing of text books aims at maintaining the quality of the matter as well as retaining its readability. This is a great responsibility and, therefore, the need for the editing of fiction and poetry text books is unchallengeable.

8.9 AIDS-TO-ANSWERS

I

1 (The books, which are interesting, sell more. The readers find interest in fiction.)

2 (A great novel is known by all. The requirements for a textbook are different.)

II

1 (Every poet wants to express herself/himself in her/his poems. A poet has very many emotions and feelings.)

2 (The editor ensures that the language of the poetry textbook is easy and the subject-matter does not have violence. The poems should reflect correct moral values.)

III

1 (The editor examines the manuscript from many angles. Its thematic suitability for the target students of a certain class is an important factor.)

2 (Every author is different and so, her/his choice of words and sentence construction will also be different.)

IV

1 (Names like Hanuman or Ajanta are known to Indian students. No one has to explain such references to the students.)

2 (Education is for acquiring knowledge. Knowledge is not limited to our own country's history and culture.)

V

1 (Editing is important for every textbook. A fiction textbook should be free from controversial material.)

2 (An editor is supposed to have many qualities. She/He prevents the future trouble for the publisher.)

VI

1 (Different branches of literature have distinctive characters. Poetry has its own special character.)

2 (Editing of poetry is different. The skill required in the editor of a poetry textbook is also different.)

8.10 FOR FURTHER READINGS

1. Judith Butcher, *Copy Editing: The Cambridge Handbook*, (Cambridge University Press)
2. – – – , *Authors' and Publishers' Guides*, (Cambridge University Press)
3. – – – , *The Chicago Manual of Style,* (University of Chicago Press)
4. Mary Hill and Wendell Cochran, *Into Print: A Practical Guide to Writing, Illustrating and Publishing*, (Kaufmann)
5. Joseph Lasky, *Proof-reading and Copy Preparation*, (Mentor Press)
6. Ed. H.K. Kaul, *Handbook for Indian Authors*, (Munshiram Manoharlal)
7. G.D. Khosla, *Know Your Copyright*, (Orient Longman)
8. Theodore M. Bernstein, *The Careful Writer*, (Atheneum)
9. – – – , *Preparation of Manuscript and Correction of Proofs*, (Cambridge University Press)
10. Ed. A.J. Loveridge, *Preparing Text Books Manuscripts: A Guide for Authors in Developing Countries*, (Unesco)