

What's the charge?

John Kerr

Ever since I joined the Society of Editors, the issuing [sic] of rates has been something quietly discussed between adults, never in public. Many editors have a fee they would like to charge but seldom manage to. I have been a professional historian for more than a decade and the story is rather the same, with an important difference: my historian colleagues were keen to publish their fees. Hearing Hilary Beaton, director of the Queensland Writers Centre, lament the coyness of editors in publishing a scale of fees galvanised me into action.

In May 2000, in preparation for GST, I did an update on a fee scale I had prepared for historians. The levels may be different for editors, but many of the principles are the same. So I have used those principles to draw up a scale for editors to discuss.

It would be idealistic to expect that publishing a fee scale produced an immediate increase in income. But what an agreed scale of fees will do is provide a benchmark, for editors and their clients.

Some of you may remember that the salaries of chief executives and senior staff have been a matter of great secrecy. The Federal and State Governments legislated to require publication of the salaries in \$10 000 bands. The result? Every CEO looked to see what his or her counterpart was getting and many started demanding more, to be equal with their colleagues. The effect will not be as dramatic, but I am sure that editors will benefit by adopting a fee scale.

We all know that levels of payment are based on qualifications and experience. As a guide, below I present suggested fees at four levels at four annual rates of basic remuneration:

\$	
Editor (base-level graduate)	36 350
Consulting	45 440
Experienced consulting editor	56 800
Senior consulting	71 000

When quoting for work, an editor has to make provision for superannuation (say 10%), plus office expenses, rent, local travel (say 10%), making:

\$	
Editor (base-level graduate)	43 620
Consulting	54 530
Experienced consulting editor	68 160
Senior consulting	85 200

When quoting on the basis of a weekly wage, remember that a year contains only 43 weeks, after you subtract 4 weeks annual leave, 10 working days for public holidays, and three weeks provision for sick leave, and time in which you may have to travel. For weekly rates this makes:

\$	
Editor (base-level graduate)	1015
Consulting	1268
Experienced consulting	1585
Senior consulting	1981

For quoting on the short term (hourly rates), remember all the interruptions that are a part of running a business. When charging by the hour most of us find we can't charge anyone for these unavoidable interruptions. Consequently I have used 28 hours as the number of chargeable hours in a week to get the following hourly rates:

\$	
Editor (base-level graduate)	36.20
Consulting	45.30
Experienced consulting	56.60
Senior consulting	70.80

In these calculations, nothing has been added as a loading for short-term projects. If the project is a short one, an urgent interruption, historians will naturally add a loading, perhaps 10 per cent to weekly rates, 25 per cent to hourly rates. This suggests weekly rates:

\$	
Editor (base-level graduate)	1115
Consulting	1395
Experienced consulting	1655
Senior consulting	2180

and hourly rates:

\$	
Editor (base-level graduate)	45.00
Consulting	56.00
Experienced consulting	70.00
Senior consulting	88.00

In the above, nothing has been added for GST. All professional editors conducting a business must have their ABN (Australian Business Number) but not all of us will have registered for GST.

If you are registered for GST, you will have to add 10 per cent GST, which will become an input tax for the business or enterprise engaging your services. So if you are not registered for GST, your price will look lower, but in reality will not be, because there is no input tax credit to be deducted from a tax liability. How the difference between the GST and non-GST rates will be perceived I do not know.

In her talk, Hilary Beaton suggested \$65 per hour as a rate for editors. And you may well think my rates are too low. Perhaps the differentials are too small, or too great. But I offer the above only as a guide to get people thinking. Put your ideas on paper, and let's have a scale of fees to go with accreditation!

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