Stop editing. Start directing.

'Whomp!' It's the sound of a ream of paper slamming your desktop—and it's a bit like what can happen to you if you're just another editor who edits…and doesn't direct.

As a longtime editor myself, I feel for you—but only so much—when you get a story that's overwritten. Especially if you get that story on deadline (and it seems like that's the way it always is with long stories!), there isn't much you can do but give it a quick read and shoehorn it in.

If that's the norm in your newsroom, it's time to change. Now.

The key: Stop editing and start directing.

I love good editors. They make good copy better. In the process, they make reporters look good by massaging their copy into packages that are easier to read and more understandable.

But editors assume a passive/reactive role when they allow reporters to file stories without direction. It is part of the editor's role and responsibility to work with the reporter and offer suggestions on approach and details of the package.

It's also part of the editor's role and responsibility to control the newsroom and the proper flow of copy for each issue. It's just not possible for an editor to do that without that directing that flow.

The package at right is more appealing than the long, long story at left. Yes, it still happens.

Before that reporter goes out to cover the county council, have her sit with you and tell you what she expects will happen at tonight's meeting. If she doesn't know, she should.

What's the focus of the story? Who's involved? What's going to happen as a result of the council's session? What conflicts, if any, will arise?

Talk with her about the package—not just the story. What about a sidebar? A photo? A graphic? An infobox? Any mug shots?

How long does she think the lead story will be? What about the sidebar?

When can she begin writing? How much time will it take her? What about follow-up calls?

Your chat should take no more than two or three minutes.

Think this is too much? Think you're just too busy?

Consider this: Two or three minutes now may save you a half hour or so later in the day, when you're already busy…and on deadline…and tired…

...and…

Whomp!

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Kevin Slimp
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