



AMERICAN CINEMA EDITORS

**Best Practices for Replacement Editors
and Editors Being Replaced**

ACE Best Practices for Replacement Editors and Editors Being Replaced

Replacing editors on film and television projects has become all too common, and has been experienced by almost everyone in our organization. ACE wants to encourage greater transparency and offer guidance for editors on both sides of this challenging situation.

Editors are mostly freelancers who rarely have job evaluations, negotiated severance pay or the support of an HR department, and our contracts usually stipulate that we can be let go “without cause.” There are no customary procedures in the case of an editor being replaced, or an editor coming onto a job in progress, yet the issue is important enough that the DGA cites rules for replacing editors in its [Creative Rights Manual](#).

We recognize that the experience of being replaced can be confusing and even traumatic. Editors may also be reluctant to share their experiences due to embarrassment or fear of future job loss. On the other side, it can be flattering to be asked to come onto a project as a “fixer,” though the transition can still be awkward and unnecessarily covert. In the spirit of ACE’s mission to advance the dignity of the editing profession and promote mutual respect among our peers, we would like to destigmatize the process and empower our membership to change the culture from within.

Whatever the situation, there are a few “Best Practices” to keep in mind.

CONTRACTUAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

Before taking a job, here are some points to consider negotiating on your own or through your agent.

- **Ask for a guaranteed minimum number of weeks of employment.**
- **Ask for single-card, first position credit**, which would be amended if necessary. Credit is typically at producers’ discretion, but the Editors Guild specifies that an editor needs to sign a waiver to add another name to the editor’s credit.

SUGGESTIONS FOR EDITORS BEING REPLACED:

There are many scenarios that can lead to an editor being replaced. It can happen suddenly – without advance evaluation of performance – or gradually, as part of a challenging creative process. There can be anxiety and panic after test screenings or focus groups. Sometimes editors are caught between directors and producers who disagree or find themselves dismissed by a studio or producer where a “fresh eye” is their solution to the perceived problem. Most frustratingly, you may not ever get a full explanation of what isn’t working, or why you were let go.

While still on the job, if there have already been conversations or intimations about bringing on another editor, consider:

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- **Is an open dialogue possible?** While remaining sensitive to the power dynamics at play, initiate a conversation with the director/producer about their plans going forward.
- **Sample questions:** Is this an issue of creative differences or personality/communication style? Is the director frustrated, or are concerns coming from the studio? Are the issues the result of recent screenings/focus groups?
- **Offer solution-based creative approaches.** Are there new ideas you can try with the director/producers to address studio and/or creative concerns? Be proactive and remind your collaborators that you are a team player ready to explore different approaches.
- **On TV shows, the presentation of the director's cut to the producers can be a time of turbulence.** Often a director's approach doesn't match the pattern of an established show. As the editor, you are more familiar with the format. Offer to recut the show for a few days and bring it back toward expectations.

When the decision has already been made that you will be replaced:

- **Ask for feedback** about why you are being replaced. This may be hard to hear, but there could be useful information to take away for future jobs.
- **Offer to stay on as a consultant.** It can be humbling, but also exciting, to see new approaches to the material and have the chance to incorporate that into your work. Remind the producer that you have a deep understanding of the footage and can be incredibly helpful in collaboration with another editor.
- **Suggest a transition period** devoted to the transfer of information. It can be difficult to remain involved in this way, but producers may appreciate your willingness to do so and that may benefit you in the long run.
- **Remain on good terms with everyone involved.** This project may be over, but your conduct during the transition can lead to future opportunities, even with the same team.
- **Think about your assistant(s) and how to best support them.** Often an assistant will feel loyalty toward you and feel compelled to leave if you are forced out. This may not be in their best interest, and it may be better for them and for the project if they stay.

SUGGESTIONS FOR INCOMING EDITORS:

- **Transparency is important.** Ask the person who approaches you about the job if the previous/current editor is aware that they are looking for a replacement. That could be your agent, a producer or even the director; whoever first brings the job to your attention should be able to give you an honest assessment of the situation.
- **Other questions for producers/directors:** Have they shared their concerns with the previous/current editor about why they aren't satisfied? Do they have a clear idea of a creative direction, or are they looking for new ideas?

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- **Set clear boundaries from the beginning.** Agreeing on a timeframe for a recut is key. Do you want time to work alone or is collaborative work expected?
- **Open Communication is best.** If you feel comfortable, reach out to the other editor and let them know that you have been approached about their job. Find out their side of the story and let them know that you would like to keep the lines of communication open. To the extent that you can, try to extend an empathetic hand. You are inheriting their project, and regardless of what ends up in the final cut, all the foundational work matters.
- **Consider co-editing.** Coming on as a consulting editor can be effective, and the “fresh eyes” approach really can be just that. Collaborating with the original editor can save time and may yield better results than a full replacement.

CREDIT CONSIDERATIONS:

Once a replacement editor has been hired, the issue of credits will arise. This too can be complex. There are many options, and each is worth considering.

- a shared card in alphabetical order or with the editor who did the most work given priority
- an additional editor credit in a prominent place or listed with the post-production team
- a consulting editor credit
- a special thanks

As a last resort, the Credit & Arbitration Committee of the Editors Guild will intervene when a screen credit dispute arises. A panel reviews the different versions of the project and makes a determination.

IN CONCLUSION:

As stated in our ACE credo, we are an organization that seeks to advance the prestige and dignity of the film editing profession. To that end, we want to offer the highest caliber of performance and professionalism to our creative collaborators and to our fellow ACE members. We believe that by fostering transparency and communication, we can reduce the stigma and negativity that can arise when editors are replaced, and we can build a better creative coalition in our profession.

If you find yourself on either side of this issue and want an experienced and sympathetic ear, one of our members can offer support. Please reach out to the ACE office to be connected with another editor.