Elite Editing

Senior Editing Test (Publishing Clients)

**Test Instructions**

1. Please follow [*The Chicago Manual of Style*](https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html) (*CMoS*), 17th edition, and adhere to the first-listed spellings in [*Merriam-Webster*](https://www.merriam-webster.com/). (That means if a word has multiple spellings, like “goodbye,” “good-bye,” and “goodby,” please use only the main entry.)
2. Use Track Changes. For this test, it doesn’t matter what the signature is set to.
3. Do not overcomment; there’s no need to explain the rationale or justification for your edits (e.g., citing common *CMoS* rules) unless the edit is uncommon. Only comment if you’re flagging something you think the author should weigh in on. Keep your comments diplomatic and precise. Address comments to the author with “AU.”
4. Respect the author’s style. We don’t want to cause author frustration by undoing clearly intentional stylistic devices like fragments or elided conjunctions.
   1. This means that you should not make substantive edits—word echoes or repetition and other problematic terms should be brought up in a comment to the author. Example: “AU: *Worked* appears four times in this paragraph; consider an alternative like *succeeded* or similar to avoid repetition.”
   2. Of course, true errors should be addressed, but you should not find yourself rewriting for style.
5. Speaking of true errors: be very aware of continuity errors, tense issues (especially with the past perfect or intrusion of the present in a simple past narrative context), homophone errors, and plain ol’ typos. Really watch out for tense shifts (e.g., if it’s a past tense narrative, even ongoing conditions should be in past tense, and use past perfect as needed to aid in readability and comprehension).
6. Internal thoughts can be styled using italics, per house style. No need to edit to roman or text enclosed in quotation marks.
7. Spaced suspension points are fine; lowercase any word after a midsentence ellipsis unless it’s a proper noun, per house style.

***About completing and submitting the editing test***

* When you’ve completed this test (as well as any other tests you’ve decided to take), [please click here for a submission link](https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/f990fe751b69411fac1e3d3d0159e164).
* Once you’ve opened the submission link, answer the questions on the upload form, attach the completed test(s), and then hit “Submit.”
* At this point, you should see a confirmation screen that confirms we’ve received your test or tests. We will respond within 7 days to let you know the results of your test(s).
* May the forces of good grammar and beautiful words be with you.

*To Liora for understanding that serial killers are a valid discussion for our anniversary vacation.*

**Chapter One**

***Chicago, Illinois, Sunday, July 10, 2016***

The sharp scent of formaldehyde filled the room as he poured the liquid into the mixture. He hated the smell at first. But he learned to appreciate it, knowing what it represented: eternity. The embalming fluid kept things from deteriorating. ’Til death do us part was an unambitious concept at best. True love should ascend beyond that point.

He added more salt than the last time, hoping for better results. It was a delicate balance; he’d learned that the hard way. The embalming fluid promised eternity, but the saline solution added flexibility.

A good relationship has to be flexible.

There was a creak beyond the locked door. The noises, a series of irregular squeaking and scraping sounds, intermingled with the girl’s labored groans, grated on his nerves. She was trying to untie herself again. Always moving, always trying to get away from him—they were all same at first. But she’d change, he would make sure of that. There would be no more incessant movement, no muffled begging, no hoarse scrams.

She would be quiet and still. And then they would learn to love each other.

A sudden crash broke his concentration. Irritated, he put down the salt and went over to the barred door. He unlocked it, and pushed it open. Light spilled into the dark room beyond.

She was lying on the floor squirming. She had tipped the wooden chair to its side, and it had broken. Somehow she’d managed to get her feet loose and was pushing herself across the floor on her bare back, trying to . . . what? Leave? There was no leaving. Her naked body was wiggling in a way that made him feel uncomfortable. Along with her muffled grunts, she seemed almost more animal than human. This had to stop.

He walked in, grabbed her by the arm and pulled her to her feet, ignoring her scream. She started thrashing and wriggling.

“Stop that.” he said harshly.

She didn’t. He nearly hit her then, but instead forced himself to breathe deeply several times, unclenching his rigid fist. A bruise wouldn’t fade easily from a dead body, and he wanted her reasonably unblemished.

Ideally, he wanted to postpone this moment. With the previous girl, he’d actually had a romantic candle-lit dinner just before the transformation. It was nice.

But not necessary.

He could leave her in the room like this, but she might hurt herself, scrape her perfect milky skin, and he didn’t want that to happen.

Instead, he shoved her into his workshop and sat her down in his own chair. She squirmed, her left foot striking his shin. The foot was bare, the kick painless, but it annoyed him. He grabbed the scalpel from the table and placed the sharp blade on her left breast, just under her nipple.

“You don’t stop moving I’ll cut,” he said, his voice cold.

She slumped immediately, trembling in fear. Her submissiveness excited him, a sweet moment of foreplay, and his heart raced faster. He was already falling in love.

He gently picked up the noose he had prepared beforehand from the table. He was happy with the rope’s texture. Previously, he had used a regular cotton rope and hated the mark it left. The friction marred the perfect skin. This time he got a synthetic all-purpose rope. The texture was smooth, pleasant. He thought she might like its touch.

He placed it around her throat. As she sensed the silky rope tightening on her neck, she began thrashing again, but it was too late for any of that.

The noose was a simple slip knot with one tiny change. He had wedged a slim metal bar inside the knot. Now he slid the knot until the noose was tight around her throat - tight enough that it wouldn’t move around. He wanted only one mark, not more. Then, grasping the metal bar, he turned it clockwise. One twist, two twists, three twists—the noose gripped her neck tighter and tighter. Her thrashing became even wilder and one of her feet hit the table violently, leaving a bruise for sure. Another final twist . . . it was enough.

As her thrashing weakened, he considered the mark the noose would leave. Initially, he had wished there would be no mark at all. But he now thought of it as his first gift, a beautiful necklace to signify their bond. Regular people use a ring around a finger. No wonder the divorce rate is so high.

When the squirming stopped, he trembled with excitement. He really should start working on her. The faster he got the embalming mixture into her body, the fresher it would be.

But he was overcome by desire.

He decided he could have a bit of fun first.

**Chapter 2**

***Dale City, Virginia, Thursday, July 14, 2016***

Katy Baxter sat up in the darkness, a scream wedged in her throat, her fingers clutching the bedsheets. Her body shook slightly, and her heart thrummed in her chest. Her relief at realizing she was in her bedroom was palpable. *Just another nightmare.* She knew it would come when she went to sleep. The nightmares always came back when she got the brown envelopes in the mail.

She hated herself for being so easily manipulated, so weak.

She picked up her phone from the nightstand and checked the time. The bright light of the screen made her blink, spots danced in her vision. Twenty-one minutes past four. *Damn it.* It was just early enough to start the day rather than having a chance to coax herself back to sleep. It would be a seven cups of coffee kind of day. No way she could manage with her usual five.

She got up and untangled herself from the blanket, shivering as the cold air caressed her bare torso and shoulders. She had managed to twist it several times around her waste during the night. She turned on the light, blinking. Through the window, she watched the building opposite her, still shrouded in the night’s darkness. All its windows were dark. She was one the first in the street to wake up—an undesirable achievement. She looked at the messy bed, clothes on the floor, the scattered books on her nightstand. Chaos, in her mind and out of it.

*Katy*, she recalled the voice from her dream, *open the door. Can’t stay in there forever, Katy.* And then that giggle, the sound of a man consumed by need.

She shuddered and shook her head. She was thirty-three years old, damn it. She wasn’t a child anymore. When would her memories release their hold on her?

Probably never. The past had a way of sinking its roots deep inside. That’s something she, of all people, should know. How many of her subjects had been permanently scarred and changed by their own pasts?

She plodded into the bathroom, discarding her shirt and underwear on the floor behind her. The water of the shower cleared her head, helped her to shake loose the last threads of sleep. The shampoo bottle was empty. She filled it with some water to get the dregs, and came up with nothing. She had used this trick yesterday, and three days ago. If she wanted shampoo, she’d have to buy some. She let the water caress her skin a bit more. Refreshed, she walked out of the shower, thinking, *add shampoo to shopping list. Add shampoo to shopping list.* She rummaged through the clothes on the floor, finding nothing she wanted to wear. Opening the closet, she located a button-down blue shirt and black pants and put them on. *Add shampoo to shopping list.* She combed her auburn hair impatiently, stopping once the worst tangles were gone. *Add shampoo to shopping list.*

She plodded to the kitchen and switched on the light. Her eyes immediately focused on the king of the kitchen: the coffee machine. She walked over and picked up the jar of the Colombian ground coffee that stood next to it. She never ran out of coffee, not since the debacle back in the summer of 2011. Two filters in the machine, to make it stronger. She needed an aggressive caffeine jolt to get her going in the morning. She put a small mountain of coffee inside the filters, then added a bit more. She poured the water on top, then turned the machine on, watching the beautiful sight of coffee trickling into the pot.

While she waited for the liquid of life to brew, she walked to the shopping list on the fridge door and stared at it. There was something she had to add. Finally, she wrote down toilet paper. It was a safe bet; she was always running out of toilet paper. She returned to the machine and poured the coffee into her favorite, albeit chipped, white mug, ignoring the row of unused mugs on the shelf. They had been exiled from use for being too small or too large, or having a thick lip or an uncomfortable grip. The coffee mug Hall of Shame.

She sipped the brew, inhaling as she did. She stood next to the machine, just drinking and enjoying the feeling of coffee spreading through her body, until the mug was empty.

*One. Six more to go.*

The brown envelope laid on the wooden kitchen table, the grey strip of cloth protruding from it. She had discarded it there the night before, as if trying to prove to herself she didn’t care, that it didn’t matter anymore.

Now, in the darkness of early morning, it seemed like a stupid thing to have done. She picked up the envelope and walked over to her home office where her desk was. She gathered her courage and opened the desk’s bottom drawer, the one that she almost always kept closed.

A small stack of similar envelopes lay inside. She shoved the newest envelop onto the pile, crumpled it, and slammed the drawer shut. She felt better. She walked back into the kitchen, her steps a bit lighter.

As the clutches of the nightmare faded she realized she was starving. Here’s the one good thing about waking up early: she had ample time to make herself some breakfast. She cracked two eggs into the frying pan, let them sizzle, put a piece of bread in the toaster. She decided she deserved a dollop of cream cheese on her plate as well. She smiled as she slid the eggs out of the frying pan and laid them gently on the plate. Both yokes remained unbroken. A win for Katy Baxter. She cut the toast into triangles, then carefully dipped one of them in the round, yellow center and bit into it.

Exquisite. How could a simple egg taste so good? And the thing to really go with this breakfast was a cup of coffee. She poured herself another one.

*Two.*

She glanced at her phone again. Five-thirty. Still too early to go to work. But the thought of staying in this silent apartment, with the envelope lurking in the drawer, was unpleasant.

*If I need to break this door, you’ll regret it, Katy.*

The hell with it. She could do some paperwork. Chief Manusco would be happy.

She went downstairs and slid into her cherry-colored Ford Fiesta. She switched the engine on, and put on Taylor Swift’s “Red,” fast forwarding to “All Too Well.” Taylor’s voice and guitar filled the car’s small interior, soothing Katy’s frayed nerves. She could always count on Taylor to make it all better.

The streets of Dade City were nearly empty. The sky was still dark, and a shade of dark blue signified the approaching sunrise. Katy enjoyed the silence as she drove down Dale Boulevard. Maybe she should start waking up every day at four in the morning. She had the world to herself. Just her and the bastard trucker who cut in ahead of her, forcing her to slow down. Taylor’s song was now mixed with the torrent of curses that Katy hurled into the open air, honking furiously. The trucker sped on.

She got on I-95 and drove South, as Taylor switched to “22.” Katy pressed the gas pedal, relishing the acceleration. She cranked up the volume and sang along, her head rocking slightly with the song’s cheerful beat. Life was pretty good after all. She’d make herself a fourth cup of coffee when she’d get to work, she decided. Those cups should carry her until lunchtime. She got off on Fuller Road, the road signs to Quantico leading the way.

She parked her car in the nearly-empty parking lot, a small smattering of other cars dotting her surroundings. A short walk, an ID card flipped at the entrance, two flights of stairs and she was in her office. The silence of the entire floor was a bit disconcerting. The FBI’s Behavioral Analysis Unit was hardly a noisy place even in the middle of the day, but she could usually hear agents talking in the corridor, the occasional hurried foot steps passing by her doorway. Today, it was all quiet except for the hum of the air conditioning. She sat down in front of her computer, preparing herself mentally for the weekly report she knew Mancuso would demand as soon as she arrived. Katy was required to turn in a weekly report every Monday, summarizing her previous week’s work. She typically handed it over on the following Friday, by which time Mancuso had threatened to send her back to Boston. But today would be different. For once, she’d have the report ready on Thursday, only three days late, freeing her from this bureaucratic nightmare until next week. Katy smiled as she started typing it in.

The phone on her desk jolted her awake. She gazed in confusion at her monitor, where the sentence *Weekly Report July 4-8, 2016* remained orphaned, with no report following. She must have fallen asleep trying to think of how to start. The time on the bottom right of the monitor was 9:12 a.m. So much for getting an early start. She answered her phone, rotating her head in an attempt to relieve the pain in her neck.

“BAU, this is Baxter.”

“Katy,” Mancuso’s voice said, “Good morning. Can you drop by my office? There’s something I want you to have a look at.”

“Sure, on my way.”

The Unit Chief’s office was four doors down the corridor. The bronze plaque on the door read *Unit Chief Christine Mancuso*. Katy knocked on the door, and Mancuso immediately called her in.

Katy sat down in the visitor’s chair across from the desk. Mancuso sat on the other side of the desk, her chair swiveled sideways. She was staring in deep concentration at the aquarium that stood against the rear wall. She was an impressive looking woman, her tawny skin smooth and hardly touched by age, her black hair pulled back, silvery white strands intermingled in it. She faced sideways, and the beauty mark by her lips pointed directly at Katy.

Katy looked at the object of the chief’s fascination. The aquarium’s interior changed often, matching Mancuso’s whims. It was currently designed to look like a lush forest, clusters of aquatic plants coloring the water green and turquoise. Swarms of yellow, orange, and purple fish swam lazily this way and that.

“Something up with the fish?” Katy asked.

“Bilinda is depressed today,” Mancuso muttered. “I think she’s upset Timothy is swimming with Rebecca and Jasmine.”

“Well . . . Maybe Timothy just needed some time off,” Katy suggested.

“Timothy’s a bastard.”

“Right . . . uh, you wanted to see me?”

Mancuso turned her chair and faced Katy. “You know Lionel Goodwin, the analyst?”

“He’s the one who always complains everyone is stealing his food.”

“He’s a part of the Highway Serial Killings Initiative.”

Katy took a moment to remember what that was. A disturbing pattern of women’s bodies discarded along interstate highways had emerged over the past ten years. Analysts in FBI had found some common ground for the murders. The victims were mostly prostitutes or drug users; the suspects were predominantly long-haul truck drivers. To try and match specific patterns to suspects, the FBI launched the Highway Serial Killings Initiative. They would search for similar crimes on ViCAP, the FBI’s database of violent crimes, then try to match them to routes and timelines of the suspects.

“Okay,” Katy nodded.

“He thinks he’s found a pattern, and he’s matched it to a group of possible suspects.”

“That’s great,” Katy said. “What do you need me to—”

“The group consists of 217 truckers.”

“Ah.”

Mancuso opened a drawer, took out a thick folder, and slammed it on the table.

“Are these the suspects?” Katy asked.

“Oh, no,” Mancuso said. “Those are just the crime files from the various police departments involved.” She took out two additional folders, and put them on top of the first one. “These are the suspects.”

“You want me to narrow it down?” Katy asked.

“Yes, please,” Mancuso smiled. “If you can give me a group of ten suspects by the end of next week, that would be great.”

Katy nodded, excitement rising within her. It was the first-real time profiling she was asked to do since she’d joined the Behavioral Analysis Unit. Narrowing a group of two hundred seventeen suspects down to ten in a *month* would be a difficult job. Could she do it in a week?

She could. This was what she did best.

“Oh, and the weekly report . . . do you have it ready?” Mancuso asked, her voice growing thorns. “You should have submitted it on—”

“Almost done,” Katy said, “I just need to add a few last notes.”

“Send it to me by lunchtime.”

Katy nodded, and got up. She picked up the three folders, her muscles straining under the heavy weight. She left Mancuso’s office and walked back toward her own office, already flipping the top folder open. The first page was a crime report, describing the body of a nineteen-year-old girl found in a ditch in Missouri, along I-70. She was naked, bruised in multiple places, bite marks on her neck. Katy was trying to flip to the next page when she ran into a man, her folder ramming his stomach, emitting a surprised “Ooof.”

He was tall, with wide shoulders and a mane of jet black hair. His eyes were brown and deep, hidden under thick, dark eyebrows. He looked like an older version of a smug college boy on a football scholarship. He placed his palm on his stomach, a half-smile on his face. Katy was instantly irritated with him, as if it were his fault she’d crashed into him.

“Sorry,” she said, bending to pick up the folders that had dropped on the floor.

“Don’t worry about it,” he said, and crouched to help her.

She snatched the last folder from the floor before he could touch it. “I’ve got it, thanks.”

“I see that,” he said, his grin widening as he stood up. “I don’t think we’ve met. I’m Tate Brown.”

“OK,” Katy said distractedly, trying to organize the folders in her hands.

“Do you have a name, or do I need a higher security clearance to know it?” Tate asked.

“I’m Katy,” she said, “Katy Bradley.”