EDIT
BETTER

**HOLLYWOOD-TESTED STRATEGIES
FOR POWERFUL VIDEO EDITING**

JEFF BARTSCH

Praise for

JEFF BARTSCH

"Jeff is one of the most talented and trusted editors I have ever worked with. I think anyone considering the opportunity to learn from Jeff should leap at the chance."

– Frank Sinton, Executive Producer/COO A. Smith & Co. Productions,
Former VP Programming FOX Sports Net,
Former VP Programming Disney Channel

"When I want to captivate and wow an audience, I turn to Jeff. And if you are serious about telling stories that resonate powerfully with your audience, I recommend you do the same."

– Jan Landis, 8-time EMMY-winning Television Producer,
Dr. Phil/ABC/TV Guide Network

"Editors are a dime a dozen – Jeff is an artist. The difference is that Jeff doesn't just tell a story, he makes you FEEL it."

– Mary Jaras, Executive Producer/Showrunner,
A&E, VH1, MTV, FOX, NBC, E!

"Working in a variety of genres, Jeff's use of music, effects, and pure instinct makes the raw elements of picture and sound come alive."

– Anthony Storm, Vice President/Executive Producer,
A. Smith & Co. Productions, ESPN, UFC, FOX Sports Net, TV1

"Jeff brings a keen sense of story and pacing to a project, always with a positive attitude and willingness to collaborate."

– Rupert Dobson, VP Programming, BASE Productions,
BAFTA-Nominated Showrunner,
SKY, Channel 4, Channel 5, Discovery, HGTV, Travel

"Jeff's analysis raised the discussion beyond just a single episode of our show. His insights have given my executives and I the potential to expand the impact of the entire television series."

– Mal Hamilton, DP/Producer/Director,
TEN, SBS, Seven Network, Nine Network,
BBC World, Sydney, Australia

"I read through your editorial review and was blown away by your feedback and constructive criticism. The editorial insights you provide have been invaluable for me."

– Brandon Sentnor, Freelance Editor/AE,
MTV, MTV2, New York, NY

"Jeff Bartsch is not only a great editor, he is also a great educator. Following his advice, my edits became tighter, smoother, and much more effective. It's amazing the difference a few frames can make."

– Steve Hendrickson, Los Angeles, CA

"It was really cool being able to get your feedback on my work! I completely agree with every point you made, it all makes very much sense. It's nice to get a straight answer from someone who has been very successful with it like yourself."

– Eric Ott, Editor/Designer, Oshkosh, WI

"I was thrilled with your excellent support and editing review. You pointed out items that I had overlooked, or questioned but didn't act on in my editing. It was an amazing learning experience."

– David Gwyn, Producer/Director/Photographer, Stroudsberg, PA

"OH WOW… this is great. I always felt like I wasn't very good at editing because I didn't know how to effectively use all the 'crappy' transitions. Also, editing like a novel? Genius."

– Matt Conroy, Omaha, NE

"The amount of knowledge Jeff has and the way that he communicates it instantly makes your editing prowess that much better. The information Jeff gives from experience is usually found in conversations with editors in edit bays, not readily available in text."

– James Gregg, Freelance Editor/Videographer, NJ

"Jeff has an amazing ability to flesh out concepts that previously only lurked hazily in the back of my editorial mind. I've learned more about the craft of editing from reading his insights than I ever learned in four years of film school."

– Chuck Gonzales, Producer/Editor, Houston, TX

EDIT BETTER

HOLLYWOOD-TESTED STRATEGIES FOR POWERFUL VIDEO EDITING

WARNING!

If your reaction to the title of this book is something along the lines of "Okay, tell me more," or "Sweet!!" …then you're gonna love this.

If your reaction to the title of this book is some variation of "Who does he think he is?" or "How *dare* you?!"…this book will likely drive you nuts, and I'd hate for you to suffer unnecessary mental pain.

EDIT BETTER is filled with ideas and rules, and like the art of editing, every rule has an exception. Sometimes a whole bunch of them.

This book is not about telling you what to do. It's about providing a jumping-off point for you to **do your editing the way you want to**.

It is not exhaustive or complete on any subject it addresses. You would not want to read a book that is – that book would be 927 pages long and dry as burnt toast.

It will not tell you which editing tools to use. It does not tell you what the buttons do on your favorite editing software – in fact, this book studiously avoids discussion of the specific tools of editing – the rest of the world is happy to dive into the details of that.

What this book offers instead is a wide-ranging overview of the creative application of video editing. These ideas apply whether you're telling your story with the latest fancy software, or with filmstrips, scissors, and a roll of splicing tape.

EDIT BETTER is targeted at the advanced hobbyist and emerging or growth-minded professional, toward the vast majority of the creative world who edits projects that are not – and do not need

to be – multi-million dollar movies, as sexy as that idea may seem. There are plenty of books that fully discuss the intricacies of film editing. This is not one of them.

Instead, this book offers real-world, boots-on-the-ground, Hollywood-tested strategies and ideas to help your editing and your projects communicate clearly, effectively, and powerfully.

In short, **BETTER**.

Many a video, film, or TV editor has worked with directors, producers, or clients who know that something about the edit isn't working, but just can't put their finger on what it is. In frustration, they finally ask, **"I don't know, isn't there a button to just make it better?"** No matter how much the editor might hunt for the **BETTER** button, it can't be found… because it doesn't exist, and it never will.

This book exists to help you *become* the ever-elusive **BETTER** button.

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THE SINGLE EDIT

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MUSIC: Select, Place, and Arrange

SELECT
Rule #29: Treat music as a character equal to anything or anyone in your piece.
Rule #30: Factor in expectations when selecting music.
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PLACE
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ARRANGE
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DIALOGUE

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INTRODUCTION

WHY THIS BOOK?

The world it changes, my friend. Yep, sure does. Specifically, the state of the editing of moving pictures is so far removed from its beginnings over a century ago as to be almost unrecognizable.

For the longest time, motion picture editing was a closed-off pursuit reserved for an elite few. Film editors were only hired by movie studios because the studios were the only entities with the infrastructure to edit moving pictures, or to even shoot them at all. It was an exclusive club, and breaking in took years. Once you were in, it took even more years to be allowed to begin learning how to actually shape a scene… instead of just playing babysitter to shelves full of tiny little rolls of film workprint.

Clearly, content creators no longer require a soundstage complex to shoot a movie, or multiple rooms full of equipment to edit it.

These days anyone can shoot video, edit it, and upload it to the Internet using just their cell phone. No exclusive club necessary.[1]

Here's the catch: just because the tools are available doesn't mean that anybody who picks them up will create killer results, any more than placing yours truly in the cockpit of an F-18 makes me a fighter pilot. I assure you, that outcome would not be good.

I'm reminded of a game called Othello that my siblings and I used to play when we were kids. The game consisted of reversible black and white discs and a green playing board laid out in a grid. A slogan on the side of the box informed us that the game required, "A minute to learn, a lifetime to master." I remember wondering, "Who in their right mind would want to spend a lifetime mastering a game like this?" (I've never been one for strategy games.) Even so, the phrase stuck in my mind, and I've found it quite applicable to editing.

You can indeed learn the basics of video editing in mere minutes - swap things around, cut, trim, put music underneath it and upload it to the Internet to your adoring public. It seems like a really easy thing to do. And it certainly can be.

But what people eventually realize is that editing is a complex, multi-layered process that does indeed take a lifetime to master.

As we move along that path of mastery, the more we are confronted by the gazillion different ways to edit any one project, and the process of making those choices often becomes intensely personal. And anything that's personal can get people worked up into a frenzy faster than the immediate seizure of happiness experienced by my dog Saint when you ask him if he'd like to go out for a walk.

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1   *For an extension of this idea and a peek into my crystal ball, check out* **RULE #72** (Adapt or die, because tools and processes change).

> Me: Hey Furry Butt.
> Saint's ears instantly perk up.
> Me: Wanna go for a walk?
> Saint: BARRRURRUHH!! ARRR!! ARRRR!!!!

Many people inwardly bristle at anyone with the hubris to say, "Here's how to edit **BETTER**," because that idea can easily come across more along the lines of "Your choices aren't good enough" or "You must obeyyy, obedient sheep, obeyyy." Neither being popular concepts in our culture these days.

People then respond with righteous indignation, "I will make my own choices because it's a personal thing and I am going to be me and I'm going to create my own editorial reality and who R U to tell me how to make my own personal choices you stupid big obnoxious judgmental person you stop judging me stupid judger I shall now post sarcastic yet contextless updates about you on social media."

No need for all that, folks, I promise.

I'm not here to stomp on your personal choices. Rather, I'm here to help you consider specific strategies and tactics that will enable you to edit the way you want to… in an even more powerful and effective way.

WHO ARE YOU?

In other words, who is this book for?

It's for anyone who knows editing is not a cakewalk. It goes far beyond "trim the beginning, trim the end" and that's it.

Maybe you're an advanced hobbyist, or maybe editing is something that people hire you to do part-time, or maybe you're a

multi-hyphenate type who does everything including the editing. Maybe you're a full-time assistant editor itching to make the jump to full editor.

If you're already an experienced, full-time editor, chances are you already know many of the ideas in this book.[2] But you and I both know that one new idea can make all the difference to your project when applied in the right way. I know of editors with Oscars and Emmys on their bookshelves who *still* have the desire to continuously learn. That's what got them to that award-winning place to begin with.

Who is this book *not* for?

People content to remain Beginners. If you're happy with chopping the beginning and the end of a video clip, putting a title on it and dumping it on the Internet, and that's all you need, then fantastic. That's totally cool. And you probably won't benefit from this book.

It is also not for people who think they know everything there is to know about editing. I certainly don't. But if you do, best to move on, oh omniscient one. Nothing to learn here.

I would submit, though, that if we're not growing, we're dying. If our knowledge is not expanding, it's contracting.

Personally, I'm all about growth. And I'm guessing if you're still reading this, you are too.

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2   And to my fellow professionals and artistic peers, many of whom are equally qualified to write this book: if you have additions, clarifications, or bones to pick, your thoughts are welcome at Book@ThePowerEdit.com.

WHO AM I?

I've been pursuing learning and excellence in communication my entire life. Literally.

My dad tells me that the very moment I was born, I immediately began looking around the room, looking and looking, taking everything in. Curious Jeff, right out of the gate.

I was born in Australia to American parents who moved our family back to the United States before my thick little Australian accent stuck.[3] So I grew up in the Midwest US, mainly South Dakota and Iowa, and showed an early talent for music.

At the age of four, I began piano lessons. I continued through high school where I competed in various music contests, performed a Mozart piano concerto with a regional symphony, and at the end of my senior year gave a Very Serious Performance of Heavy-Duty Classical Works. Rachmaninoff, Chopin, those guys, knowing all along that I would go absolutely nuts if I were to pursue a career as a concert pianist.

Meantime in my junior high years, some family friends gave me a little Casio keyboard, the kind you could buy for $59.99 at Radio Shack. I thought it was the best thing ever and began experimenting with basic multi-track recording, MIDI sequencing, and lots of music arranging and composing.

Then one day in 9th grade, my art teacher suggested that I do a video project. I fell in love with the process, even though I was the only person in my high school who cared about video at all.

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3   I used to mourn the loss of my accent, which is well known to make one more attractive to The Ladies. Even my wife admits that her checklist of desirable qualities in a husband included some sort of non-American accent. The silver lining: growing up with what most would refer to as a "neutral Midwestern accent" has helped me to land a decent number of well-paid voice-over jobs throughout my time in Los Angeles. Eh, who needs an accent anyway.

Of course, my entire high school had 200 students in it, and I graduated in a class of 35 people. It made sense that I was the only person who cared to walk around with a VHS camcorder on my shoulder and learn about editing on a linear, cuts-only editing system. (Hey, who needs timecode when you have control track?)[4]

After two years of college, double majoring in Bible studies and music composition, I transferred to film school out in Los Angeles. I promptly ran out of money and had to drop out of school. Thankfully, I'd been working my tail off and had impressed my professors. The head of the film department gave me a phone number that led to my first job in television.

That first job started as an unpaid internship. My boss asked if I knew the Avid, and I said no. He said that if I wanted to learn, I could show up at night and hang out with the assistant editors. I worked Friday and Sunday nights for six months for free. Years later I found out that one of the most impressive things I did was to continue to show up for six months. To me, it was a no-brainer. As far as I was concerned, they had already hired me and I just wasn't getting paid. Yet.

Having put in my late-night dues digitizing countless boxes of Betacam tapes, I was the obvious choice next time a paid position opened for a full-time assistant editor. A couple years later, I was promoted to full editor, and I've been editing television in Los Angeles ever since.

At this point, the entities for which I've edited include ABC, NBC, FOX, Universal, Disney, ESPN, MTV, The Discovery Channel and too many more to list here.

Along the way, I have been building businesses like ThePowerEdit. com that help people learn how to communicate more clearly and

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4   *For any pieces of editing jargon that you might want explained further, check out the Glossary at the end of the book.*

powerfully through video editing. We've had our materials spread all around the world to over thirty different countries, and that's just counting the ones we've heard about.

So, while I have been building my career as a professional editor, I also have a strong desire to help and encourage other editors.

Hence this book.

ASSUMPTIONS… AND YOUR EDITING

One thing I don't want to do is make assumptions about you, the reader. I've made that mistake too many times.

There was one time in particular where I really stuck my foot in my mouth through thoughtless assumptions. I was on an editor's on-line forum, and someone asked advice for his editing reel. People on the forum began commenting about what should and shouldn't be on your reel, giving the impression that they all had one and updated it regularly.

I of course had the *brilliant* idea of saying that it had been years since I've updated my demo reel, and in my experience the only people who have to rely on a demo reel don't have a strong enough credit list or professional network to get jobs by referral.

With that statement, I managed to insult almost everyone on that forum *and* present myself as an insensitive clod at the same time.

Not my finest moment.

One person responded and said, "Uhh… for those of us not in your position, we actually do need to show prospective employers our editing reels. It may not be that way in Los Angeles, but that's just the way it is out here."

Whoops.

In light of that, I don't want to assume you're in my position or that you even want to be in my position (though you may already be there). For every person out there who dreams of making a living from editing or pursuing some version of the Hollywood dream, there are plenty of others who simply want to create their own projects on their own time.

Here's what I will assume, though: I assume that you love (or at least enjoy) the process of editing, and you want to do it **BETTER**. And I am assuming that you're open to learning. If that's the case, you and I very much have those things in common.

In light of that, I would like to take this opportunity to encourage you.

There was a time early in my career when I was working on a FOX show alongside some experienced fellow editors. One of them, Charlie, was (and to this day still is) one of the most accomplished editors I have ever worked with. He had already put together some segments of the show, and as I watched his work my heart sank. I thought, "Good grief, how on earth will my work ever measure up to *that*?"

At some point I told one of my producers something like, "Man, Charlie's work is so good that I feel like a hack by comparison."

The next day, the executive producer of the show strode into my edit bay.

"I heard you said a really crappy thing," he said sternly.

"What's that?" I asked a bit nervously.

"That you feel like a hack compared to Charlie," he replied. Then he looked me in the eye and said, "Don't you ever say that about yourself. I don't hire hacks, and you do really good work."

That was a pivotal point in my career. Sometimes it takes external validation to give yourself permission to believe you really are good at this.

That process continues. Just as external validation has been a huge encouragement to me throughout my career, I'd bet good money that it's a good thing in your world too, and I'd like to offer some up to you.

Because from where I sit, the sheer fact that you're reading this tells me that you are open to learning. And those of us who actively learn how to communicate more powerfully through editing often find that **our work is already more powerful than we may have given ourselves permission to believe**.

I'll bet you're already pretty good at this editing thing.

So consider that idea, be encouraged, and let's dive in.

EDIT BETTER

GLOSSARY

16: Short for 16-millimeter film, as in "They shot on 16." Super 16 is a variation of the same film size.

35: See "16". Super 35 is a variation of the same film size.

Avid: refers both to Avid Technology Inc. – a publicly-traded company founded in 1987 based out of Burlington, MA – and their flagship NLE product, Media Composer. The Media Composer is typically referred to as "the Avid," as in "They're cutting on the Avid" or "Avid is the number one tool for editors to learn if they want to edit projects that pay well." Avid is by far the industry standard NLE platform used around the world.

B-roll: Generally refers to cutaways or general covering shots, typically not the primary content of the piece. Comes from the days of optical film labs when lab techs would lay out sections of film alternating in checkerboard fashion between the actual physical A-roll and the B-roll.

Bites: Short for soundbites. Usually refers to a complete thought from a formally interviewed on-screen personality. The bite may be unedited or a full-on Frankenbite. As in, "we need to swap her bite for something stronger." Often misspelled as "byte."

Control Track: In physical videotape, a consistent electronic pulse at the beginning of each frame that keeps the playback electronics in proper sync and at the right playback speed. Similar in function to the sprocket holes on physical film which keep everything running smoothly.

Dailies: in general, refers to unedited source materials. More likely to be used in the context of scripted projects that have specific

RESOURCES

To learn more about powerful communication through video editing, connect with the author and like-minded individuals at:

ThePowerEdit.com

Youtube.com/user/thepoweredit

On Facebook, look for "The Power Edit on FB"

EDIT BETTER

Many a film or TV editor has worked with directors, producers, or clients who know that something about the edit isn't working, but just can't put their finger on what it is. In frustration, they finally ask, **"I don't know, isn't there a button to just make it better?"** No matter how much the editor might hunt for the "BETTER" button, it can't be found... because it doesn't exist, and it never will.

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—Frank Sinton, Executive Producer/COO A. Smith & Co. Productions, Former VP Programming FOX Sports Net, Former VP Programming Disney Channel

JEFF BARTSCH built his career editing television in Hollywood for clients that include ABC, NBC, FOX, Universal, Disney, ESPN, MTV, and many others. His commentary on editing and the entertainment industry has been featured in USA Today, TIME Magazine, the Associated Press, and multiple textbooks. He and his wife Chantel live in Los Angeles with a very happy German Shepherd named Saint.

$19.99

ISBN 978-0-9904325-0-0

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