EFA Suggested Guidelines for Editorial Testing

Best practices for tests (also called "sample edits"):
• Tests may be paid or unpaid.
• They should be representative of the material you usually write.
• Tests should include instructions regarding the preferred style guide* and any relevant house style guidelines, if applicable.
• Instructions should address the preferred method for testing, such as onscreen, in Microsoft Word and using Track Changes; onscreen, marking up a PDF; or hard copy.
• Unpaid tests:
  o Should be no more than the equivalent of five standard (250-word, double-spaced) pages.
  o Should require about an hour of the candidate’s time. A reasonable period should be allowed for turnaround.
  o Should be part of an unpublished work if it’s fiction or creative nonfiction and the author intends to work directly with the editor; i.e., if you’re a fiction or memoir author, send an unedited excerpt or a full manuscript to the prospective editor. If you’re sending samples to multiple editors, send each editor the same portion of the manuscript so you can directly compare the work.
  o Should not be any part of an unpublished work if it’s shorter content, such as blogs or articles; i.e., do not send an unedited portion of the full manuscript to the prospective editor, unless you’re paying for the test. With shorter content, the best unpaid sample edits are derived from early drafts of published (prior to completed editing) or inactive work.
• Paid tests:
  o May be from the full manuscript in question. The client should inform the candidate when “live”† work is given as a test.

* A style guide is a comprehensive set of language guidelines. Having and using a style guide helps to ensure consistent choices across all content.

† “Live” work is that currently being edited.