

WHAT TYPE OF EDITING DO YOU NEED?

If you google “How many different types of editing are there?”, you’re going to get a variety of answers – and, just to add to the confusion, some of them might even be called different things by different people.

This guide goes through the different types of editing in detail: the different names, what they entail, and when they should take place.

Read on to find out more...



INTRODUCTION TO THE EDITING PROCESS

In this guide, I've grouped all the different types of editing into three stages that should be undertaken separately and in this order:

- **Big-picture editing**, where an editor works with you to perfect things like plot, structure, and characters.
- **The finer details**, where an editor works with you on your sentence-level writing craft.
- **The finest details**, where an editor tidies up your text to prepare it for publication.

Each of these types of editing is a separate skill that requires the full attention of an editor. That's why it's so important that you go through each of these stages separately – whether with a professional or on your own.

A book published by a traditional publisher will usually go through all of these stages before publication. As an indie author, especially if you're new to self-publishing, it's helpful to replicate this process yourself (as best you can) if you want your books to have that same professional finish.

This guide includes a brief overview of what each stage entails and some examples of the types of changes and comments an editor might make as they work through each one. **To see what the different types of editing actually look like on a document, check out the different [services pages](#) on my website.**

Of course, I appreciate that professional help at every stage may not be affordable for everyone. And, since you may have to make a choice about where to target professional editing help, I've added some of the benefits of paying for a pro as well as some cheaper alternatives if that's out of your budget.

BEFORE YOU START...

Okay, I lied before. There are actually **four** stages of editing. But one of them doesn't involve a professional editor at all, and that's why I haven't included it in the list above.

Self-editing is the first stage your manuscript should go through – usually several times.

The more thoroughly you have edited your own work before you engage the services of an editor, the more you will get out of the process. If you know your book is full of unresolved plot holes when you send it to an editor, you may be paying them to tell you what you already know.

You should be more or less happy with the state of your manuscript before asking for professional feedback on it. That way, your editor can focus their attention on the things you haven't spotted rather than the ones you just haven't got around to fixing yet.

Getting your manuscript in good shape before editing also has another benefit: it might save you money!

Most editors will set the price of their services based on a sample, assessing how much intervention is needed and accounting for the time required to do the work. A manuscript filled with avoidable errors will take longer to edit than one that's been cleaned up beforehand, meaning the editor will have to charge more.

So, before you think about engaging an editor, make sure you thoroughly revise your manuscript yourself!

BIG-PICTURE EDITING

There are two main services aimed at perfecting the bigger picture...

DEVELOPMENTAL EDITING

Developmental editing is an in-depth edit of all of the bigger-picture elements of your book – plots and sub-plots, characters, narrative, and perspective – and a round of developmental editing can substantially change your story. It can sometimes be referred to as “structural editing” or “content editing”.

A developmental edit will help ensure that your characters’ motivations are clear and that there’s a satisfying structure that keeps your readers interested until the very end. It is not intended to delve into any of the finer details like spelling, punctuation, or the way you craft individual sentences.

During a developmental edit, an editor might recommend moving, rewriting, or even cutting parts of your work. You should be prepared to be challenged, but it’s all for a good reason: to make your book the best possible version of itself.

Every editor does developmental edits slightly differently, but generally:

- The editor will read through your manuscript several times, assessing the different elements and making notes.
- You’ll receive an editorial report and comments in the margins of your manuscript, highlighting what works and what doesn’t, with suggestions/recommendations/references that may be helpful in addressing any issues.
- It might involve some further discussion time with your editor too, or even further rounds of editing.

You can read my description of the service and see an example of part of a developmental edit [HERE](#).

A developmental edit should leave you with plenty of ideas and inspiration to make revisions to your manuscript, giving you confidence that the bigger-picture aspects of your story are in good shape before you move on to sentence-level editing.

A developmental edit will...

You can expect a developmental edit to help you wrap up any loose ends in your story or foreshadow events that become important later on. An editor might tell you that a reader would struggle to understand why your main character acts as they do, and will help you make their motivations clearer. They might work with you to change the ending of your book so that the pieces come together in a way that's more satisfying for readers in your genre.

Why pay for it?

Developmental editing can be expensive, but it's also a wise investment. A reader might pick up your book if it's got a great cover and an interesting, well-written blurb, but they won't stick with it if the story doesn't engage them. And unsatisfied readers could mean negative reviews and fewer sales.

Alternatives

If a full developmental edit is out of reach, you could get a editorial assessment (see below) to help point you in the right direction. Of course, this means you won't get detailed comments directly on your manuscript or the same amount of your editor's time and attention, but that makes it more affordable.

EDITORIAL ASSESSMENT

Sometimes called a “manuscript assessment” or “manuscript critique”, an editorial assessment is exactly what it sounds like: an editor's assessment of your work.

The editor will read your manuscript and write a report on the strengths and weaknesses of your manuscript, covering all the same areas a developmental edit would – plot, characters, perspective, style, and pacing, as well as the book's marketability and suitability for its target audience – but without the same level of detail. Exactly how much detail you can expect will vary from editor to editor, so it's worth asking how many pages their assessments tend to be, and highlighting any areas you specifically want them to cover in their feedback.

You can read my description of the service and see the template I use for editorial assessments [HERE](#).

An editorial assessment will...

An editorial assessment might point out that you have too many unnecessary side characters distracting from your main character's important relationships, and give some suggestions about which could be cut. It might tell you that your manuscript is too long for reader expectations in the genre you're writing in, and offer some ideas about how to carve your story up into a number of books instead. The editor might tell you that your book is ready for further editing, or they might advise you to spend more time workshopping the story before moving ahead.

Why pay for it?

Since an editorial assessment only involves a single read of your book and a separate report (no detailed comments on the manuscript), the cost is relatively low in comparison with a deeper developmental or structural edit. You get a lot of useful feedback for a relatively low price and it's a great way to test the viability of your draft without spending more on developmental editing straight away.

Alternatives

If an editorial assessment from a professional editor isn't in your budget at the moment, you could try to find some beta readers instead. You may be able to find volunteers in writing groups on social media who will read your book and give you some feedback for free, or in exchange for your feedback on their own books. Of course, it may be more difficult to organise and encourage useful feedback from volunteers. Their commitment to the process and the quality of their comments may vary.

THE FINER DETAILS

This is the stage at which we get down to the sentence-level writing, and there's one main service I'd include here...

LINE EDITING

Line editing is all about keeping the reader engaged on every single page. If your story is good, they may want to stick with the book to find out what happens, but line editing is what ensures that they'll enjoy the journey. It's sometimes referred to as “stylistic editing” and it takes place after developmental editing, once the bigger-picture elements of the story are in place.

Long, meandering sentences might be flattening the tension in a scene, and a line edit can help ensure the reader feels it. There might be words or sentence constructions we end up relying on too often without realising that they make the writing feel slow and repetitive, or trip the reader up. A line editor's job is to ensure that readers remain immersed in the world you create, removing any distractions that will drag them out of it.

Line editing can take place at the same time as copyediting (see next section) as they go hand in hand – though a line editor is focused on the style and effectiveness of the writing, while a copyeditor is more focused on consistency and correctness.

You can read my description of the service and see an example of a line and copyedited manuscript [HERE](#).

A line edit will...

You can expect a line editor to make creative interventions and suggestions in track changes. They might suggest varying your sentence constructions and eliminating repetition to make your writing flow better or speed up/slow down the pace where needed. They can help make your dialogue sound more natural or impactful. And they can help fix any slips in perspective or inconsistent characterisation at sentence level.

Why pay for it?

Just as some people have an ear for music, a good line editor will have an ear for engaging prose. A professional will make sure that any changes they suggest preserve that unique voice that makes your work special, rather than imposing their own style or making it sound generic. It will be your voice, but more effective.

Alternatives

If a professional line editor is out of your budget right now, you could exchange manuscripts with another writer and work on each other's books, looking out for some of these same issues. Of course, you can't know whether their suggestions will be useful before you see them, and you also run the risk that their suggestions might erase your unique voice in favour of their own.

THE FINEST DETAILS

There are two main services here. In traditional publishing, the first (copyediting) takes place on a final draft before it is formatted for print, and the second (proofreading) takes place on the formatted manuscript. In self-publishing, especially if an author will mainly sell ebooks, they're often combined.

COPYEDITING AND PROOFREADING

Copyediting and proofreading are two different types of editing, but both are aimed at ensuring your final text has a professional finish, with minimal errors that could distract readers from your story.

Copyediting, which usually takes place before a final proofread, is where an editor works to ensure your writing is clear, consistent, and correct. This includes everything from checking the timeline of your novel all adds up to making sure words like “co-operate” are hyphenated consistently throughout (or not!), and correcting any spelling errors that crop up.

Proofreading is a final quality-control check, once all the text has been finalised. We're all human; there will always be some errors that make it this far – some might even be introduced during the editing process through messy track changes! A proofreader's job is to go over what looks like a ready-to-print manuscript with a fine-toothed comb to eliminate any lingering typos or formatting issues.

Often an editor will combine both of these services, making changes for consistency and doing a final readthrough to make sure the text is as error-free as possible.

You can read descriptions of the services and see examples of copyedited and proofread manuscripts on the [COPYEDITING](#) and [PROOFREADING](#) pages of my website.

A copyedit or proofread will...

You can expect a copyedit to ensure that any unusual names are spelled consistently throughout and that your main character doesn't live two Tuesdays in a row (unless it's intentional). You can expect a final proofread to spot a leftover typo, add in a missing full stop, or fix a skipped chapter number.

Why pay for it?

Good copyediting and proofreading are usually invisible in the final product, but you can spot a book that hasn't been properly copyedited or proofread a mile away. If your first chapter is riddled with errors, it very quickly tarnishes readers' views of your work. At best, they're a distraction from your readers' immersion in your world. At worst, readers might assume that you didn't put time and care into your work, and put your book down.

Alternatives

I wouldn't advise doing this final step yourself. It's very difficult for someone so close to the work to notice small-scale problems with it – you tend to read what you intended to write, rather than what is actually there on the page.

You could have a partner or friend do this for you instead, but the end result will very much depend on their skill level. There's a lot more to proofreading and copyediting than correcting spelling mistakes, and not hiring a professional means an increased likelihood of your book being published with embarrassing errors.

For more advice on hiring an editor, or on writing and editing more generally, check out:

keditorial.com/resources

For more about me and the services I offer, visit my website: keditorial.com

Get in touch: info@keditorial.com

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