

ABOUT EDITORS

WHAT TYPES OF EDITING ARE THERE?

1. Developmental Editing
2. Line Editing
3. Copyediting
4. Proofreading

There are also other book publishing services you may need depending on what genre your book is, how you intend to publish it, and what your budget is, including book coaching, beta reading, manuscript evaluation, sensitivity reading, formatting/book design, fact-checking, and indexing.

In this article, I break down the four main types of editing in detail and give an overview of the other services you may need.

WHAT IS EDITING?

Editing is the process by which a person prepares written material for publication by fixing errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation; condensing the content so it's more readable; organizing the content so that it flows in a logical order; or aligning it to a particular style guide.

WHAT DOES A DEVELOPMENTAL EDITOR DO?

Developmental editing involves looking at the **big picture** rather than details like grammar and punctuation. It involves looking at plot, flow, tense, structure, characterization, pace, and point of view. Developmental editors will confirm whether the **overall argument or story is sound, complete, and structured correctly**, and they will explain the problems and give advice on how to improve.

They usually provide an editorial letter of about ten to twenty pages as well as make comments within the document. Their suggestions might include changing the order of chapters, removing particular characters, changing the tone so that it will suit your intended audience, etc. They do not make changes to grammar and punctuation.

Some questions a developmental editor might ask include the following:

- Does the structure of the book make sense?
- Is this character working? Are they well developed enough? Will readers find the characters boring? Are they believable?
- Is there enough tension?
- Do the book's voice, style, and format match what would be expected in the genre?
- Is the word count appropriate for the genre?
- Is the book complete? Does it have the necessary parts for the genre, e.g., table of contents, foreword, bibliography, etc.?

This level of editing is sometimes called structural editing, substantive editing, or content editing.

Some editors will offer manuscript evaluations where they write up a detailed critique of the book/content, and the author makes the changes themselves.

WHAT DOES A LINE EDITOR DO?

Line editing involves **smoothing sentences to improve flow, sense, and style**. Line editors look at the content at the **paragraph and sentence level** rather than at the overall story. They fix awkward prose and tighten up sentences. They also check for consistency of viewpoint (who the narrator is), character details, tense, dialogue, etc.

Line editing is sometimes called stylistic editing. It's less about applying grammar rules and more about making the content sound good and more interesting, so it's important that line editors and the authors who hire them **agree on the overall style and voice** of the piece. A good line editor will not change the author's voice.

The line editor's job is to make the book/content more interesting. If something is supposed to be funny/tense/etc., they will make sure it's funny/tense/etc. They assess word choice, sentence structure, and look for repetition or redundancies that takes away from the story.

They edit the file directly and use track changes and make comments to ask questions or provide explanations for some of their changes. The author will then go through the changes and accept or reject them as they see fit.

Some editors do line editing at the same time as copyediting, while others consider it a separate service.

WHAT DOES A COPYEDITOR DO?

Copyediting involves **editing the content at a sentence level**. A copyeditor edits for **correctness, accuracy, consistency, and completeness**. Their focus is on fixing mechanical issues like **grammar, spelling, and punctuation** so readers don't trip over typos and get pulled out of the story. Clarity and readability are important.

A copyeditor checks for the following:

- Check for correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation
- Check for correct word usage (e.g., that you didn't write **accept when you meant except**)
- Provide basic fact-checking for historical details, quotations, URLs, etc.
- Check for consistent application of abbreviations, capitalization, and treatment of numbers
- Check for consistency and logic of timeline and character details
- Fix or flag confusing phrases
- Develop a style sheet to track editorial style like whether you used the serial comma or whether you spelled out numbers
- Prepare the document for the typesetter by applying styles in Microsoft Word, i.e., how the book should be formatted.

A copyeditor will not make large structural changes to a document, check for age appropriateness, or rewrite large passages. They're concerned with checking the details at a sentence level.

They edit the file directly and use track changes and make comments to ask questions or provide explanations for some of their changes. The author will then go through the changes and accept or reject them as they see fit.

Different Levels of Copyediting

There are different levels of copyediting: light, medium, and heavy. All copyeditors strive for consistency in spelling, punctuation, hyphenation, capitalization, numbering of footnotes and tables, etc. However, when it comes to language editing, some copyeditors will edit with a heavier hand depending on how many changes they feel the document needs.

Light copyediting: Light copyediting involves changing all indisputable errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation but leaving anything that isn't an outright error. The copyeditor may highlight sections that are particularly wordy but not reword them. They may ignore jargon or highlight something a reader might not understand but not make a suggestion on how to change it. They may query factual inconsistencies.

Medium copyediting: Medium copyediting involves changing all indisputable errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation and pointing out or revising awkward phrasing. The copyeditor may highlight sections that are particularly wordy and suggest ways to revise them. They may highlight something a reader might not understand and make a suggestion on how to change it. They may query factual inconsistencies and do light fact-checking to find the correct answer.

Heavy copyediting: Heavy copyediting involves changing all indisputable errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation and revising awkward phrasing. The copyeditor may reword sentences or paragraphs that are too wordy or convoluted. They may highlight something a reader might not understand and make a suggestion on how to change it. They may verify and revise factual inconsistencies.

WHAT DOES A PROOFREADER DO?

Traditionally, a proofreader works on a document that has been typeset and formatted. However, more and more proofreaders are working in Microsoft Word on documents that haven't yet been typeset, particularly when working with self-publishing authors.

Typically, **the manuscript should have already been edited**. Proofreading is the last step in the editorial process—the final quality check.

A proofreader checks for the following:

- Any errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation missed by the copyeditor
- Correct word usage (e.g., **homophones and homonyms**)
- Formatting issues with font size, style, and layout
- Cross-reference errors and broken links

If working on typeset documents, proofreaders check for the following: Compare the proof against the copyeditor's copy to ensure all the copyeditor's changes were made

- Check that word breaks are appropriate
- Ensure that the design specifications have been carried out
- Avoid making unnecessary changes (at this stage in the process, changes cost money!)

As you can see, there is some overlap between copyediting and proofreading. Copyediting involves a more detailed look at the structure and clarity of sentences, whereas **proofreading focuses on catching those last remaining typos before publication**.