

Editing

Editing is a stage of the writing process in which a writer or editor strives to improve a draft by correcting errors and making words and sentences clearer, more precise, and as effective as possible. The editing process can involve correction, condensation, organization, and other modifications performed with an intention of producing a correct, consistent, accurate and complete work.

Developmental Editing

(Also called: conceptual editing or manuscript appraisal.)

A developmental edit happens early in the writing process, often when an author has an idea for a book or a rough outline, but they need help bringing the pieces together.

A developmental editor looks at the big picture with your book, focusing on organization and structure more than word choice, punctuation, and grammar. They help ensure your arguments line up, that your stories are in the right place, and that everything flows.

These are the types of questions a developmental editor should answer for you, along with helping you fix what's not working and amp up what's working well in your book.

Keep in mind that developmental editors don't do any writing or rewriting. They might make suggestions, but their job is to help you become a better writer by explaining how to organize your ideas, structure your book's content, and transition smoothly between ideas.

They'll help you see your book the way your readers will see it and provide feedback that is aimed at helping you craft a book people will enjoy reading.

If you're a seasoned author or have confidence in the manuscript you've created, you likely don't need to hire a developmental editor. But if you need help taking your ideas and forming them into a book, developmental editing can be a major help.

(In the Scribe Professional process, this is very similar to what you do in the Positioning and Roadmap phases.)

Evaluation Editing

(Also called: manuscript critique or structural edit.)

With an evaluation edit, an editor looks at your manuscript to assess structure, flow, completeness, and overall quality. The editor will usually provide you with a short memo that summarizes their key points, areas of concern, and suggestions for your book.

They'll also mark up your manuscript at a high level, making note of any structural concerns or questions they have. Similar to a developmental editor, they're not as focused on the finer details of your writing, but rather any big picture issues.

If you receive a glowing evaluation, your book might be ready for copyediting and proofreading.

If the editor says your book's organization and structure need serious work, you might need a developmental editor.

If the structure is sound but your writing needs work, you might need a line edit or content edit to strengthen your manuscript.

An evaluation edit is a safeguard that keeps you from paying for later stage edits (described below) or trying to publishing your book before it's ready.

There is some overlap between developmental editing and evaluation editing, with the key difference being that you need a finished manuscript for an evaluation edit.

You can come to a developmental editor with or without a book, but if you want an evaluation editor to assess your work, you need to have a finished manuscript to show them.

Substantive Editing

(Also called: copy editing or full editing.)

Whereas developmental and evaluation edits look mainly at big picture issues, a content edit is the level at which an editor also starts to dig into the words on the page.

In addition to evaluating the structure of your book, a content editor reads and carefully edits the manuscript with an eye on the completeness, flow, and construction of ideas and stories, working paragraph by paragraph and chapter by chapter.

A content editor should provide you with a paragraph-level set of markups on your manuscript, offering corrections, pointing out incomplete sections, and offering advice on smoothing the flow and construction of your chapters, sections, and subsections.

A key focus for a content edit should also be the tone and voice of your manuscript. A content editor should be aware of your target audience to ensure that the way your content comes off (tone) is a good fit for that audience, and that the writing sounds like you (voice).

The key difference between a content edit and a line edit (two terms that are often used interchangeably) is that a content edit is not as detailed as a line edit. It exists between the high-level view of a developmental or evaluation edit, and the ground-level view that a line editor takes as they work through each line of your manuscript.

A content editor won't move your chapters around, but they will move sections or paragraphs around within your chapters, move content to different chapters, or delete content entirely.

Think of it this way: a developmental or evaluation editor helps you build the house (the book) and figure out which rooms (chapters) should go where.

With those rooms in place, the content editor's job is to help you arrange the furniture (sections and paragraphs) inside those rooms in a way that's appealing.

Unlike line editors, they're not concerned with the decorations (sentences).

Line Editing

(Also called: stylistic edit or comprehensive edit.)

As the name implies, a line editor performs a line-by-line review of your manuscript. Up to this point, the editors have worked on your manuscript a high level—either the macro level where they consider the entire book, or the chapter and paragraph level.

The line editor jumps into the manuscript with both feet, providing the most detailed edit you can get. Notice that I didn't say "comprehensive." A great line editor will make your prose sing, but if your content isn't structured properly, it won't matter.

That's why it's important not to jump in with line editing before your book has the proper structure and organization in place and your content is where it needs to be.

A line editor is down in the weeds, so they're not looking at the big picture. They're focusing on word choice and whether each sentence has the intended impact.

Like other editors, they focus on your book's flow, but they're more concerned with how each word in a sentence interacts with the others and how sentences flow into each other.

Line editors point out run-on sentences, sentence fragments, and clichés. They help you clarify meaning, eliminate jargon, and ensure that each sentence sounds right in the reader's mind.

They also push back against the natural inclination many of us have toward wordiness by tightening your sentences and helping you say in five words what you initially said in fifteen.

A line editor is not as concerned with errors, but rather the words you use to communicate with your reader. They want your writing to be short, simple, concise, and about the reader.

That said, a line editor may perform the duties of a copyeditor, but it's not a given. If you want an editor who can provide this kind of all-in-one service, clarify that desire up front.

Copyediting

When you have a finished manuscript—and I mean completely finished, not one that’s close to done or has a few gaps to fill in—it’s time to hire a copyeditor.

A copyeditor will meticulously go through your book and find the spelling, punctuation, and grammar mistakes.

That’s right—no matter how confident you are that your manuscript is mistake free, there are mistakes in there.

When you read your book out loud (which all authors should do), you’ll catch the sloppy mistakes and wording issues, but you’ll miss the stuff that copyeditors search for: small grammatical rules that native English speakers often don’t even realize exist.

There is a lot of data on this, but average people only detect about 60 percent of errors, and even professionals usually only catch about 85 percent. That’s why copyediting and the next type of editing (proofreading) should be in tandem.

Copyeditors not only find mistakes, they also check that your book follows the style guide appropriate for your genre (most books use the Chicago Manual of Style).

Even if you think having your neighbor read through your book is enough to find all the spelling, grammar, and punctuation mistakes (which it’s not), unless that neighbor is a professional copyeditor, they’re won’t know how to style your book correctly.

The kinds of mistakes copyeditors catch are not life threatening, but they make the difference between a professional book and one that comes across as amateur.

Proofreading

Although the terms “copyediting” and “proofreading” are often used interchangeably, they describe different processes that benefit your book in unique ways.

A proofreader takes the printed version of your book after it’s been designed and formatted (called a “proof”) and gives it a final review before the book goes to print. Since it comes right before publication, proofreading is the last line of defense against errors.

You should always have your manuscript copyedited before it goes to layout, and then always have your book professionally formatted before it goes to a proofreader.

Here’s why: like a copyeditor, a proofreader looks for typos and misplaced punctuation, but also searches for layout issues like page numbering, consistency with headings, placement of tables of figures in the text, bad line or page breaks, and more.

A proofreader isn’t looking to fix your content—just correct any errors they see.

Because so much published writing lives online nowadays, many editorial teams don't bother with proofreaders and just use copyeditors to get content ready for publication. However, many will still ask for copy to be proofread before it's published.

That's why confusion exists about how copyediting and proofreading differ. If you want to break it down, here's an easy way to remember the difference:

Copyeditors catch all the mistakes the author missed.

Proofreaders catch all the mistakes the copyeditor missed.

Editor and qualities of editor

Writers, journalists and others among the creatively talented are often heard complaining about how the piece they gave the editor was somehow substantially different from the one that was finally published. And sometimes you cannot but thank God for that.

Editors are responsible for the content of books, magazines, academic papers, and other printed or online publications. Depending on their specific roles, editors require qualities that enable them to attract and work with good writers, manage day-to-day editorial tasks and coordinate the work flow from manuscript to publication.

However, an editor's task is not an easy one. With an eye as sharp as that of an eagle they have to be adept at spotting mistakes, however, the minute they might be and capable of correcting them. In fact, the necessity of a good editor is often understood in the absence of one. Here are a few qualities that are must-haves for an editor.

1. Subject Matter Expertise

It is an editor's responsibility to make sure that the readers get the value for their money and hence it is imperative that he present the written word in a manner that is easily understood by all. Writers being the artists, super fluousness becomes almost second nature. It is then up to the editor to remove the bombastic expressions and make the text a simple read so that the reader does not have to qualify to be an Oxford graduate or be best friends with the dictionary!

Moreover, to be able to convey the right meaning only through the written word might not be the easiest task. When speaking, a person has the liberty to use tonality and body language to convey exactly what he wants to. But the same is not true when it comes to the writing; while writing a person has to put together what he would otherwise convey through his tonality and body language into his writing and that may not be the easiest task to accomplish. Hence it is then again up to the editor to make sense of what the writer had in mind and convey that to the intended audience. To do that flawlessly an editor would need to have an extensive grasp of the subject matter.

2. Command over Language

Writers often have the tendency to use bombastic language in order to attach depth and gravity to their content. This is why a writer is often unsuccessful at establishing a direct connection with the audience. It is the editor's job to remove all traces of such misdirected eloquence and present to the readers the text in a manner that can be easily understood. An editor needs to have exceptionally good command over language so that he can not only spot the mistakes but is capable of correcting them too, keeping the essence of the message intact.

An editor is supposed to be the reader's man and it is his job to know what may appeal to the reader and what may not and accordingly present the text. His job is to make the text lucid for readers to absorb the information and content without having to tax their brains too much.

3. A Keen Eye

Very importantly, an editor must be able to spot mistakes, be it syntax or punctuation errors without MS Word having to highlight them for him. Usually, the human mind works in such a way that if you are reading something that's written by someone you know and trust there is a blind spot of the human mind that comes into play. In this case, you tend to overlook the mistakes made by the person unless they are very obvious and jarring. However, the same piece of writing being read by someone who doesn't know the author may end up giving the reader a headache owing to the presence of several mistakes. Since there is hardly any recognition and trust in the latter scenario, the reader is able to pick out mistakes in the text way more easily and effectively. Hence it is extremely important that an editor has a sharp eye that is able to pick out the mistakes even in content that is written by the best in the business. At the same time, though he needs to be a man of reason and not one of the many raging egoists, and should, therefore, make sure that he does not attempt to make corrections unnecessarily. If he receives a flawless piece of work he should be able to pass it on without urging to make unnecessary changes.

The editor must have the understanding that each author may have his/her own style of writing which may or may not be according to the taste of the editor. He should be capable of being objective in a scenario where the author's style of writing may not be in tandem with his personal taste and should be able to take a call without letting his personal bias get in the way.

4. Prudence

A highly sought-after quality in an editor that most individuals today lack; no wonder good editors are becoming increasingly difficult to find. An editor is a guide and the mentor for a lot of new writers and hence should show signs of an organized and balanced mind, with perspective and understanding of what is best for the publication. He needs to have the ability to maintain his calm as publishing houses mostly work under intense pressure of deadlines. A high on excitement situation should not take a toll on his accuracy, judgment or sanity. It is also the editor's responsibility to organize content and source ideas for content that will hold the interest of the readers. Hence it is imperative that he be thoughtful and objective and knows how to get

the best out of the writers. A raging egoist would do more harm than good to the publishing house.

5. Ability to Deal with Criticism

An editor's job is certainly not the best job in the world! Ranging between pressuring to sometimes even thankless, an editor is faced with a lot of criticism. Writers, especially experienced ones are not particularly fond of the editors because they are the ones who mostly take the call on what needs to be written about and can easily veto any writer's hours of hard work. Good writers usually pour their hearts out while writing and hence are very sensitive to criticism or changes. Since it is the editor's job to 'clean' a particular piece of writing, it is not difficult to assume why they are not frequent contenders of the 'best boss' awards! However, an editor needs to have the ability to deal with all the criticism that may come his way and still deliver with as much drive and passion as may be necessary. He must have the ability to sort out disagreements with the writers without getting personal and should be capable of dealing with wry looks or even contempt from them without taking it personally.

Being an editor and a good one at that is thus not everyone's cup of tea. Even if your English is flawless and eloquence is your virtue, you may not be a successful editor, solely because editorial skills go way beyond basic language skills. While an editor's job may not be the best job, it is because of him that a publishing house is able to maintain its standards and retain its readers. And any and every publishing house knows that full well, irrespective of whether they publicly acknowledge the fact (and most of them don't!!). Well, if not for the editor any newspaper or magazine would be in a state of absolute mayhem!