

Eight Great Reasons to Hire an Editor and a Proofreader

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Introduction

'Can editors proofread their own work?'

This is a question that comes up often for authors, editors and those commissioning editorial help.

This booklet helps to clarify why, if you're an author, business or organisation looking to commission, it's better to hire an editor and a proofreader separately.

The publishing process

Before diving into the reasons why these are independent tasks, it's useful just to take a look at what and where they are in the publishing process:

COPY-EDITING ➡ DESIGN/TYPESETTING ➡ PROOFREADING

Copy-editing works on raw text, usually in Word.
It edits for:

- Grammar and syntax
- Typos
- Sense and clarity
- Stylistic consistency
- Flow of the text

- Notes and references
- Bibliography
- Legals
- Tags/marks up the file for design and formatting

As a task it's more granular, involved and requires a higher level of skill and technical input.

Proofreading works on typeset, laid-out pages.
For print, it checks:

- Grammar
- Typos
- Sense and clarity
- Stylistic consistency
- Notes, references, bibliography
- Paragraphing, line and word breaks
- Layout and spacing
- Pagination
- Running heads and footers

For ebook, it also checks:

- Page flow and general e-reader file functioning
- Table of Contents linking
- Other internal links
- File errors and artefacts (i.e. random odd characters)

It's basic, final work on the designed content: less interventionist, picking up fundamental errors and design or formatting issues, rather than a re-edit of the text.

Publishing professionals operate this pathway as standard because:

- It's best practice – each role in the production process has its own technical requirements, tasks and focus
- It's an iterative process – projects go through several stages to reach publication. Careful checks at each stage are key to a quality result.

The problem with perfection

'OK, but what does this mean – isn't it an editor's job to fix everything? I know there might be errors in my text, aren't they supposed to make it all perfect?'

In publishing circles there is a lot of discussion around 'accuracy rates': this means the amount of text that an editor can be reasonably expected to 'get right'.

There are three significant factors:

- Perfection is impossible

- Editors are human too
- ‘Accuracy’ as a notion is subjective

Perfection is impossible

Say you are commissioning an editor and expecting a 100 per cent accuracy rate. In an ideal world, every text would emerge completely pristine; but in reality, that expectation may need to be managed.

No matter how diligent, talented or experienced an editor might be, they will never turn in a completely error-free text. Good editors work to high standards and deliver excellent quality and value, but perfection is simply not achievable.

Editors are human too

Unfortunately, in the Information Age and even with the best will in the world, human beings have not yet evolved to cyborg!

Editors do use specialist software such as PerfectIt and macros in Word to do a lot of mechanical work, check the text and eliminate as much error and inconsistency as

possible in addition to a forensic read, but these programs cannot cover everything.

Editing is deep work. By the end of a read, your editor may have had to go over the text several times to check things.

The old adage of not being able to see the wood for the trees comes into play here. Past a certain point, your editor simply becomes too close to the text to be able to revisit it with any real distance or objectivity.
If an editor proofreads their own work, there's a likelihood of missing things the second time around.

Of course, this doesn't just affect editors; authors can suffer from it too – commonly known as 'revision hell'!

It's always good to have a fresh, eagle eye at proof stage, just to cover any eventualities for both you and your copy-editor.

Accuracy is subjective

One person's definition of 'accuracy' can differ wildly from another's, so perhaps it's helpful to define what this is –

especially when it comes to the difference between stylistic choice and error.

For example, a typo is a clear error, while a choice to style a spelling or form a particular way is not.

A style point only becomes an error when:

- A firm decision on a form already exists
- It has been noted and clearly communicated
- It hasn't been followed consistently, or at all

Misunderstanding of 'zombie rules' can inject another level of confusion into this area. These are 'rules' that appear to be grammar or language law, but are actually pure fable or simply incorrect.
For example, contrary to popular belief (and decades of strict teaching in schools), starting a sentence with a conjunction such as 'And' or 'But' is not a grammar crime!

To resolve this, it's good to discuss any spellings, forms and stylistic likes or dislikes with your editor before the copy-edit begins – especially if any branding is involved.

They can note these on the style sheet for the project, and make sure your preferences are applied consistently. Also, that everyone in the production process – especially your proofreader – can be aware of them.

What do editors aim for?

In short, to make a text fit for purpose. To be clear: 'good enough' doesn't mean shoddy standards!

Still high-quality for publication, just realistic.

How can a separate proofread benefit me?

Especially if you're self-publishing, it's understandable you'll have a great deal to think about, organise and manage – not least, the issue of budget.

It can seem easier just to hire one person for editing and proofreading, but here are two more good reasons why you should consider both.

Level of input and rates

As mentioned previously, editing and proofreading are separate processes requiring different levels of experience, skill and focus.

No doubt you'll want an experienced copy-editor to shepherd your original text, but a proofreader doesn't

have to be trained to the same level to deliver their own function well and capably.

This is usually reflected in their rates, so it can be more cost-effective to hire both.

Solid quality control

Regardless of how excellent a job your copy-editor may have done, errors can still creep in during the design and typesetting phase.

This is especially relevant in ebook production where, for example, artefacts can appear out of nowhere during the conversion process to the e-reader file – this is nobody's fault; rather, a technical glitch.

If you commission a proofreader trained in formatted ebooks, they will know to hunt these down and correct them. They'll check the essential workings of your file on an e-reader, to make sure it's sound for upload to your chosen publishing platform.

If you're also going into print, they'll do a separate read of your text laid out in PDF proof (as listed above), to ensure all's well.

In summary…

By commissioning a separate proofread, what you gain is the security of knowing your text has been read more than once by specialists – it's been worked on as best as it possibly can be.

Commissioning an editor and a proofreader gives you the reassurance of optimum care – and a great result.

If you've found the advice in this booklet useful and would like more information or assistance with your project, contact me:

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