

Manuscript Assessment and Development Editing

Manuscript Assessment
and
Development Editing



Copyright © 2022 Lisa Cordaro Publishing Services

The right of Lisa Cordaro to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the author.

No part of this publication may be used or reproduced in any manner for the purpose of training artificial intelligence technologies or systems.

This booklet is intended as general guidance only. The author disclaims any responsibility in law or otherwise for any action resulting from the use of any information or advice given in this booklet.

Introduction

If you're new to publishing or self-publishing – perhaps a first-time author – you might be wondering what editorial service would be best to help you bring your manuscript into shape.

This mini-guide outlines:

- what manuscript assessment and development editing are
- how they work in practice
- how they can support you in your writing and publishing journey.

Manuscript assessment

This is usually the first stage: it's advisable to have an assessment done before entering into full script development. Assessment is a diagnostic tool to identify the strengths of your script – what's working well – and what perhaps might benefit from adjustment or being worked on through a process of redrafting and revision. Typical aspects are tone, voice, structure and execution of content.

Assessment is an overarching analysis of your script. It delivers an 'editorial letter': a structured report on the various elements of the script providing clear, actionable and constructive feedback to consider.

As an editor, I provide notes at source in the script to accompany my report. Not all editors do this, but in my experience, authors find direct visuals of the points outlined in the report helpful: they can see exactly how it manifests in their writing and if necessary, what might benefit from being addressed.

Assessment can be a great way for authors to get expert advice in the first instance, cost-effectively.

It's just worth clarifying that as a diagnostic tool, assessment does not actively go in and alter or resolve the issues in a script. Instead, it simply identifies them, recommending potential pathways and solutions for the author to take away and consider. From there, the author works on these themselves.

Development editing

For more involved input and bespoke guidance, a development edit can really have a positive impact on your script. For non-fiction, it's 360-degree analysis of:

- Language and style
- Voice, tone and address for audience reception, clarity and engagement
- Salience and structural repetition
- Narrative flow, pacing and paragraphing
- Content: thesis and execution – i.e. do the current form and function meet the book's intention and purpose
- Overall structure, including chapter length and balance
- Logical progression
- Presentation – including visuals, for the genre and market
- Referencing system, citation/bibliography
- Extra value-adds
- Legals (any initial standouts such as libel and copyright; NB: this is usually covered in more detail during a copy-edit).

Every manuscript is unique, as is its author, and every text presents different issues – so the advice that development delivers is tailored specially to you and your project. There is no one-size fits all.

As an overall, high-level approach to the script, development provides detailed notes and feedback on each draft. It can be (and often is) an iterative process.

Your editor will read and advocate both for you as the author and for the reader. This dual, neutral lens is invaluable to help you gain clarity on your writing, and insight into how your readers are going to receive and experience it.

It's also an active process, involving direct interaction between author and editor on how the drafting is going. It can include meetings and one-to-one discussion.

Development editing is not book coaching

Book coaching provides active input while you're writing your script. It can help you with outlining and organising your content, reviewing it as you write, and supporting you with motivation, milestones and accountability.

A book coach can help you structure your writing schedule: often, they break down delivery into chunks or chapter-by-chapter, so you don't have to come up with a huge amount of content in one go.

This way, the process is manageable, not overwhelming: you can feel supported and encouraged that you're getting results within the time and space you have available.

Manuscript assessment and development editing start from the first full, complete draft of your script. It can start after that stage too, if you've done some self-editing or already put your script out for review by beta readers, colleagues, target audience or fellow writers. If you want support while writing your first draft, you need a book coach rather than a development editor.

Development editing is not copy-editing

Sometimes, authors ask development editors to look at the more detailed, sentence-level aspects of their script, such as grammar, typos and so forth.

While development does read for elements such as sense, clarity and good narrative flow – and might make recommendations on standard of English, if the condition of the text could affect its clarity or reader comprehension – it's important just to be aware that it doesn't address the more granular aspects of the

writing. This is a separate task and done later, rather than at the same time.

The thing about copy-editing and proofreading is that neither are the right stage to be looking at more complex factors such as structure, how an author expresses themselves, publication purposes, audience reception, positioning and market. By that stage, it's assumed these have already been thought about and decided. These later functions are really finessing at a more basic level.

Conversely, some authors want to go straight to copy-editing after drafting. They're keen to publish, which is great! However, copy-editing can't cover the depth of expert analysis and guidance that development provides.

It can mean missing out on the more significant (and sometimes essential) work of structuring, crafting and shaping a script for good publication standard and – importantly – positive reader reception.

It's not uncommon – and in fact, actually quite normal – to be unaware of certain aspects of our writing that might need to be looked at for publication beyond

rogue typos. Past a certain point during the writing process, it's possible to fall into what's known as 'revision hell', where we've gone through our text so many times that we simply can't see the wood for the trees.

This is where assessment comes in, because with detached and reassuring input, it's possible to step back, take a breath and identify any areas needing work. Development addresses them, then the process moves to the final polish of copy-editing and proofreading to make sure your book goes out of the door nicely suited and booted!

(For more handy tips and information on selecting the right stage of editing for you, see my mini-guide,*The Different Types of Editing: A Quick and Easy Guide*.)

How to find a good development editor

The main thing you'll want to look for is an editor with solid technical experience and a portfolio in your genre.

As mentioned earlier, development editing is as much about understanding the market you're publishing into,

and shaping your book for success in that sector, as it is about skilful handling of an entire volume of text.

You want someone who really knows and understands your tribe – the readers you want to speak to and reach.

How long does it take?

Developing a book is deep work, so being realistic from the outset about what you're able to do in the time you have available is key. If you're self-publishing, have a fixed publication date in mind and want to set a schedule, or want to query an agent or publisher, that is of course fine and possible.

Many editors also work on a more open-ended basis, according to what authors can manage alongside their existing commitments. We completely understand that authors have lives! We take the lead from you, and don't pressure delivery within an uncomfortable or constrained time frame, if that really doesn't work.

Some books take months, others longer – it depends on your schedule and what you're able to achieve.

Like any project, it's fine to allow for a gestation period: time to think, plan, execute and deliver a book of which you can be really proud!

If you're thinking of writing a book and would like a sounding board for your idea and advice on how to move forward, as well as information on publishing and how it works; or if you already have a script and would like to discuss some options for editing, I offer a one-to-one confidential call to help you identify and plan your needs.

Contact me:



lisa@lisacordaro.com

Connect with me:



www.linkedin.com/in/lisacordaroedit/