

The Different Types of Editing: A Quick and Easy Guide

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Introduction

If you're new to writing or publishing, or an expert in your field needing editorial support, you might be finding it confusing which kind of assistance to choose.

This handy guide outlines each one step-by-step, to help you decide on the best option for you.

The editing process

There are six different types of editing:

- Manuscript assessment
- Development editing
- Structural editing
- Line editing
- Copy-editing
- Proofreading

Let's take a look at how they show up in the publishing process.



Manuscript assessment

This is a high-level review of your script to assess its core strengths, as well as elements that perhaps might benefit from input or adjustment for successful publication. Typical aspects are tone, voice, structure and execution of content.

An assessment delivers responsive, supportive feedback and practical, actionable suggestions in an extensive report (known as an 'editorial letter').

Some editors provide example comments in the script as well, which helps to show you how and where the points outlined might be manifesting.

Assessment can be a great, cost-effective way for you to get expert guidance on your writing, and how your script stands right now.

You can commission one to get advice on a first draft, or later if you've already done some self-editing.

It's worth clarifying that assessment is a diagnostic tool that doesn't actively go in and resolve issues in a script. It identifies them, and recommends possible options, pathways and solutions for you to take away and consider.

Development editing

Following assessment, a development edit can really help you pull your content together and shape it effectively to publish. It examines:

- Language and style
- Voice, tone and address for audience reception, clarity and engagement

- Salience and structural repetition
- Narrative flow and paragraphing
- Pacing
- Content: thesis and execution (i.e. does the current form meet the book's intention/purpose)
- Overall structure, including chapter length and balance, logical progression
- Presentation, including visuals, for the genre and market
- Referencing system, citation/bibliography
- Legals (any initial, obvious standouts such as libel and copyright; NB: this is usually covered in more detail during a copy-edit)
- Publication purpose, intended readership and market

Every script is unique, as is its author, and every text presents different issues – so the specialist advice that development delivers is completely bespoke to you.

It's an overall, big-picture analysis of your script, with detailed notes and feedback on each draft. It can be (and often is) an iterative process.

It's also interactive, with direct discussion between you and your editor on how the drafting is going. This can include phone calls, meetings and email or messaging.

Structural editing

If you've worked through the development process, the chances are you won't need this type of editing because you'll have already addressed and resolved structure.

If not, this can be a useful form of edit to consider if you know what you want to say and have a script put together, but feel you need help organising the content or ideas.

It can also help if you're repurposing content: for example, if you're turning a series of articles, blogs or audio transcripts from podcasts or videos into a book.

During a structural edit, your editor analyses the content, considers its ordering for logic and sense, and actively works with the text by (re)structuring sections and/or chapters to make the overall result cohesive, consistent and sound.

Line editing

Line editing is intensive, sentence-level work for style, narrative, creative use of language, evening out elements such as inconsistency in voice and expression.

Line editing can be useful if you know your content well, but might not be feeling quite so confident about writing or ability to convey it: if expressing yourself or your ideas could benefit from a helping hand.

This type of editing takes what you've written, drills down into your intention, and understands and honours your purpose.

Then, rewrites to ensure your meaning comes across clearly, and flows beautifully.

Copy-editing

This stage works on raw text, usually in Word. It reads for:

- Grammar and syntax
- Standard of English
- Typos
- Sense, clarity and meaning
- Stylistic consistency

- Flow of the text
- Notes and references
- Bibliography
- Legals
- Tags/marks up the file for page design and ebook formatting

As a task, copy-editing is more granular, involved and requires a higher level of skill and technical input than proofreading.

Usually, the copy-edit will deliver queries for you to consider and resolve.

It also delivers a style sheet of the styles, spellings and forms applied during the edit for consistency. This is a baseline guide for you, your designer and proofreader to consult after the edit is complete.

Proofreading

This works on designed and typeset, laid-out pages.

For print, it checks:

- Grammar
- Typos

- Standard of English
- Sense, clarity and meaning
- 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)

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

Final points

As we've seen, this pathway moves from higher-level work down to finer details.

Regardless of which type of editing you decide on to start with, copy-editing and proofreading are always recommended for every publication project – just to make sure it goes out of the door in its best suit!

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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