



Nicky Taylor Editorial

Fiction and creative non-fiction editing
for independent writers

The Different Stages of Editing



Chartered Institute of Editing and Proofreading

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You've probably been advised that before you contact an editor, you need to determine what type of editing it is you're looking for. If you've searched online for definitions of the different types of editing available, it's possible that you'll be more confused than ever – even editors can't agree!

What matters most is that you're clear about what services are being offered, and what you'll be getting. With that in mind, here's an explanation of what I mean when I talk about the different stages of editing.

Developmental Editing

Developmental editing, also known as **structural** or **substantive editing**, addresses the big-picture storytelling issues such as structure, theme, audience and genre expectations, plot, characterisation, narrative distance, point of view, tension, pace and narrative shape, opening and closing chapters, timelines and settings, scene and summary, dialogue, voice and tone, language and style, and more. That's a lot to consider!

A **full developmental edit** is the most in-depth option and, unsurprisingly, the most expensive. It includes an **editorial report** or **assessment**, as well as notes and comments throughout the manuscript itself to highlight specific instances of where storytelling technique or narrative structure can be improved. In-text edits and comments also illustrate suggested solutions to issues which are covered in a broader, more general manner in the report. A developmental edit is conducted in rounds, whereby the manuscript goes back to the author after the first round and then comes back to me for the second round once the author has made their revisions.

The report itself, also often called a **manuscript critique**, is an 8–15 page document offering constructive and honest feedback on storytelling elements such as those mentioned earlier, and suggestions for how to make improvements. It's a detailed summary which, if you choose to have an editorial report rather than a full developmental edit, will guide you when you start on your own edits.

Line and copy-editing

So, you're satisfied with your story – all the big-picture elements are working together, and it's now time to stop tweaking your manuscript and hand it over to someone else. The next stage is a **line and copy-edit**.

Put simply, **line editing** – also known as **stylistic editing** – focuses on improving your writing by ensuring that it's artful in the way that it flows, and correct and consistent in the way that it's presented. **Copy-editing** aims to correct your writing by making sentences and paragraphs clear in meaning and consistent in style. So, you can see that the lines between the two are somewhat blurred.

In traditional publishing these are two separate processes, with line editing taking place before copy-editing. For the independent writer this is likely to be financially prohibitive, so I offer a combination of **line and copy-editing**, balanced according to the individual needs of the manuscript. This involves an in-depth treatment of the text at word and sentence level, fine-tuning your language, enhancing your voice and making your writing more elegant. If you're self-publishing and your budget only allows for one editing process, my advice would be to make it this one.

Line and copy-editing focuses on improving style and flow; the way language is used and the rhythm of how it's presented. It's about connecting with your reader. It also ensures that the choice of language is appropriate for your audience. A line and copy-edit looks for any plot, timeline, setting and character inconsistencies, such as a seven-year pregnancy (it happens!) or a house where the rooms keep changing position in relation to each other. I try to get under the skin of the characters, so if one of them speaks, behaves or reacts in a way that seems out of character, I'll notice. This type of edit will also tackle any problems with dialogue, beats and tagging, and instances of too much explanation; telling the reader rather than showing them.

It's also about clarity, comprehension and consistency. You may know what you intended when you wrote that scene, but is it clear to the reader? A line and copy-edit will eliminate any ambiguity or confusion. All writers develop crutch words or writerly tics which can become irritating to the reader and draw them out of the story. This stage of editing will fix this repetition, along with any redundant language and awkward syntax, and incorrect grammar, spelling and punctuation. In addition, it includes checking for accuracy and correcting basic factual errors, as well as flagging up any potential legal and sensitivity issues. It will also make sure that formatting and presentation choices are consistent and conform to a style guide, such as Oxford New Hart's Rules, Chicago Manual of Style, or whatever your personal choice may

be. If this is an area you haven't previously considered, I can advise and make appropriate suggestions.

Proofreading

Proofreading is often used as a generic editing term, so many writers think they want their work proofread when in fact they want a copy-edit. Essentially, proofreading is the final polish that takes place after line and copy-editing. It's the last thorough review before publication, so the final chance to catch any errors that have slipped through or been more recently introduced. To put it simply, a proofread looks for typos, formatting inconsistencies and errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation.

You may wonder why you need a proofread as well as a line and copy-edit – doesn't that also deal with spelling, grammar and punctuation? Well, yes, it does. But bear in mind that, as you've read above, the editor has to focus on many different aspects of the manuscript; so while in a line and copy-edit I always correct every error I see, it's inevitable that some will slip through. In addition, formatting and design will have a major impact on your finished product. If your budget allows, I would always recommend a final proofread of the formatted version prior to publication.

All editors and proofreaders are human, so the chances of a 100 per cent success rate are low to non-existent; but the fewer distractions there are at this stage, the more successful the proofread is likely to be. This is why it's especially important that the manuscript is ready. If the proofreader has to make corrections which should have been done in the edit, their concentration – and it is a job which demands exceptional focus and attention to detail – will be diverted.

The right choice?

Some writers know exactly what stage their manuscript is at and what input they now want or need. Others might not be so sure. Perhaps you're too close to your work and unable to judge what it now requires. If so, how do you know if you've made the right choice? And what if you haven't?

Deciding what level of editorial input a manuscript needs is not an exact science. Sometimes it's evident from the samples provided that some developmental help is necessary before the line and copy-edit takes place, and I'll always recommend accordingly – there's no point in paying for copy-editing if you're going to do major revisions afterwards.

Sometimes, however, it isn't clear until the line and copy-edit is underway. It might be that if there aren't too many developmental issues, they can be dealt with during the line and copy-edit: for example, if the point of view keeps shifting within the same scene. If that's the case, then I'll return the manuscript after the first pass so that revisions can be made in advance of me doing the second pass of editing.

If there are more fundamental problems, I'll recommend a change in the type of editing, and any payment already made will be taken into account. This can work the opposite way, too, although it's less common. If a writer has booked an editorial report and it becomes apparent that the few issues there are could be dealt with in a line and copy-edit, then I will advise accordingly.

The bottom line is that flexibility and trust are key to a successful editor—author relationship.

Whatever stage of editing you may be ready for, please contact me for a free no-obligation quote.