



Copy-editing and Proofreading

What is the difference between a copy-editor and a proofreader?

A **copy-editor** makes sure that an author's text (or copy) is correct in terms of spelling, grammar and punctuation, and that it is easy to read. They focus on continuity, flow, rhythm, repetition and phrasing, and may make sensitive suggestions for rewording. A copy-editor also tries to prevent embarrassing errors of fact, and ensures the typesetter can do a good job. They will do their work on the final manuscript, *before* typesetting.

Copy-edited text should ideally be subjected to a separate additional proofread because errors can be introduced during any rewriting according to the copy-editor's suggestions.

A **proofreader** is the final quality-control check before publication. He or she will correct basic errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar, and ensure consistent styles of tense, hyphenation and capitalisation. They will correct or highlight omissions and inconsistencies in content, layout and typography.

Proofreading does not include rewriting, restructuring or substantive editing. Those require more specialist professional skills and, ideally, should be undertaken earlier in the manuscript drafting process.

What are the benefits of using a copy-editor and/or proofreader?

- As a writer, you're probably too close to your own work to spot errors – even with careful re-reading, your eyes read what they expect to see and it is easy to miss inconsistencies and mistakes.
- A professional is trained to identify errors and inconsistencies that even a very good writer will miss.
- You can be confident that your work will have a professional polish before publication: grammar, punctuation, spelling, continuity, consistency, rhythm, phrasing, instances of repetition.
- A copy-editor will bring a fresh eye to the text and will offer helpful suggestions for improving the flow so that your meaning is clearly communicated to readers.
- A professional copy-edit/proofread should help avoid embarrassment, scathing reviews and plummeting or nonexistent sales.

Can't I use the spellcheck on my computer?

That's a good start, but a spellcheck will only check spelling, and often the context is missing. A word may be spelled correctly, but it may be the wrong word in that particular sentence. For instance, the error in the phrase "he had received a letter form his grandmother" would not be picked up by spellchecking software.

But I can't afford to hire a professional...

In the words of *USA Today* bestselling author Helen Hollick: "You can't afford *not* to..." because your credibility as an author rests on the quality of your writing and the professional way it is presented. **The Society for Editors and Proofreaders (SfEP)** says: "People will judge you on the quality of what you put in front of them. [They] will not take you or your message seriously if it unclear, inconsistent or poorly presented... You are asking people to spend time reading it, and it is simple courtesy to smooth the reader's path."

Common errors picked up by our copy-editors and proofreaders

- Incorrect use of commas, including sentences joined using the comma "splice".
- Missing commas before direct address.
- Incorrectly punctuated dialogue.
- Inconsistent use of single or double quote marks.
- Misplaced apostrophes.
- Inconsistent presentation of numbers.
- Outdated use of a double space after a full stop.



- Extra line breaks between paragraphs.
- Inconsistent or incorrect use of italic, bold or upper case letters.
- Repetition, or words used in the wrong context.
- Continuity issues.
- Plot inconsistencies.
- Thoughts set out as dialogue.
- Inconsistent spellings: amongst/among, targetted/targeted.
- Confusion over words ending -ise/ize.

Will a copy-editor or proofreader make my text perfect?

Perfect text is the aim, and often it is possible to get very close. However, in reality, perfection requires inordinate amounts of time and money. Most self-publishing and indie authors have a set budget and a limited timescale. There may also be other factors to consider. For instance:

- The manuscript submitted is first or second draft only, and is not yet ready for publication.
- The writer made last-minute changes or substantial re-writes.
- Parts of the text are missing or incomplete.
- Different people wrote various parts of the manuscript.
- Content, images and sense do not match.
- There is an unrealistic timescale before publication.
- The subject matter is complex and language- or fact-checking is required.
- The copy-editor or proofreader wasn't given enough time to do a thorough job.
- The writer didn't budget for a professional copy-edit before moving on to proofreading.
- A well-meaning but untrained friend did an early 'proofread' which made the text inconsistent.
- The writer introduced errors or inconsistencies after copy-editing and before proofreading.

An excellent copy-editor or proofreader is also human, and often the timescale or budget means they can sort out the *worst* problems, not *all* the problems. The Society for Editors and Proofreaders says that, as a general rule, a well-trained copy-editor will pick up 80% of errors, and a well-trained proofreader will pick up 80% of what's left.

At what stage in the publishing process is my work copy-edited and proofread?

All editing, proofreading and polishing should take place in the Word document before the final manuscript is typeset. Corrections are simple to implement at this stage, whereas changes after typesetting risk a delay in publication. Typesetting involves many hours of painstaking work – selecting a typeface appropriate for the genre, setting up hierarchies of chapter heading, sub-heading, paragraph and character styles (in a complex document there can be up to 50 subtly different styles), setting and adjusting margins, refining line spacing and tracking, eradicating widows/orphans and correcting other typographic anomalies.

After typesetting, even a relatively small change can mean that the entire layout needs reformatting. Amendments and late corrections to typeset text must be kept to a minimum to avoid unnecessary additional work, delay and cost – and to avoid the risk of introducing further errors.

How will corrections be marked in my Word doc?

Our copy-editors and proofreaders use a function of Microsoft Word called Track Changes. Where necessary, further suggestions are made using the Comments function (Toolbar > Review > Comments). Along with the annotated manuscript, you will also receive an acceptance form which contains brief instructions on how to work with your copy-edited or proofread document.



*"The expertise of SilverWood behind me
certainly gave me confidence."*

Yvonne Payne

How long does the process take?

As a very rough guide, we allow three to four weeks, however you will receive an estimated timescale for the project before you commit to the service. Please let us know if you wish the work to be completed by a specific date and we will either confirm, or propose an alternative deadline. The timescale is dependent on the manuscript being received by SilverWood at an agreed time. If the manuscript is received later than agreed, a revised timescale may be given.

In the unlikely event of a delay caused by circumstances outside our control, you will be notified at the earliest opportunity. Delivery of the copy-edited or proofread manuscript will be by email, and deemed to have occurred at the time the email is sent. It is your responsibility to confirm receipt of the copy-edited or proofread manuscript.

Signing off

We will provide you with a sign-off form when the project is delivered to you. The form requires that you sign to confirm receipt of the work and that the work has been completed according to the standards set out in this document. It is your responsibility to complete and return the form to us, and if you do not do so within seven days we will interpret this as implicit acceptance of the project as delivered.

Payment terms

Payment must be received in advance of the work commencing. The fee will be calculated on the total word count of the supplied text rounded to the nearest 500 words, and VAT will be added at the standard rate for UK and EU taxpayers where applicable.

Additional notes

- Please be reassured that we take confidentiality and copyright issues very seriously. Our staff are subject to a confidentiality clause. Your manuscript will be secure, and not used for any other purpose than for us to complete the work.
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Talk with the SilverWood team about your manuscript

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