



FREELANCE EDITING 101

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LESSON #1

What Does a Freelance Editor Do?

Most editorial freelancers offer one or more levels of editing. These may include the following:

Editorial Services

1. Proofreading
2. Critiquing
3. Content Editing (aka Substantive Editing)
4. Copyediting (aka Line-by-Line Editing)
5. Developmental Editing (aka Book Doctoring)

These services are likely done separately, but some of them can occur simultaneously.

Writing Services

1. Rewriting
2. Ghostwriting/Coauthoring
3. Mentoring

Related Services

1. Transcribing
2. Data Entry
3. Indexing
4. Translating
5. Research

NOTE: Different editors define the above terms differently or use different terms. It's important to determine exactly what services you offer and explain to your clients what they entail.

Editorial Services

1. Proofreading

I list this level first because it's the most basic form of editing. Although proofreading may be included at any of the other stages, a straight proofread is best done last—*after* the other levels of editing have been completed since editorial changes may generate typographical errors. A

thorough proofread should always be done just before a manuscript is sent to an agent, a publisher, or the typesetter.

There are two types of proofreads.

A. Traditional Proofread

The proofreader reads through all of the text, searching for the following:

- typographical errors (including the direction of curly quotation marks and apostrophes)
- misspelled words (including incorrect word usage)
- grammatical problems (including verb tenses and syntax)
- punctuation mistakes (including proper abbreviations and capitalization)
- inconsistent format (in font size/style for text, chapter headings, subheadings, lists, tables, page numbers, margins, spacing, indentations/paragraphs, quotes, references, citations, footnotes/endnotes, etc.)
- letter or sentence spacing errors
- inappropriate end-of-line word breaks (bad breaks)
- widows and orphans
- specialized terms, character names, location references, etc.
- numerical and alphabetical sequences
- vertical and horizontal alignment of set-off text (including paragraph indents)
- references to illustrations, tables, and figures within the text

B. Page Proof (aka *Galley Proof* or *Character-by-Character Proofread*)

The page proofer carefully compares the latest version of a project with earlier stages to make sure all changes have been made correctly. This proofreader double-checks formatting and accuracy in all sections, including titles, subtitles, running heads, tables/charts, page numbers, table of contents, bad line breaks, and page widows and orphans.

Page proofing is sometimes done on galleys, after a manuscript has been typeset, comparing them with the author's final draft. The proofreader marks discrepancies in colored pencil on the hard copy (printed pages) or a PDF, usually for a publisher.

This step can also be beneficial for authors who have made numerous editorial changes to verify that changes have been properly made.

If a manuscript contains Scripture quotations, the proofreader may be required to look up the quotes to verify they have been copied accurately and the reference is the correct one for that quote (including the version being used). (This will be covered in more detail in Lesson 6, "Tips for Editing Nonfiction.")

If the material in the manuscript appears to be incorrect in punctuation, usage, grammar, or spelling, the proofreader may either (a) mark the errors on the manuscript, (b) list questions for the author on a separate query sheet, or (c) ignore the errors. The method to be used is dependent on the clients' preferences.

2. Critiquing

A manuscript critique is a broad overall assessment/review of an author's manuscript, pinpointing its strengths and weaknesses. Specific problem areas are flagged and general suggestions for improvement made, but a critique does not provide detailed advice on manuscript revision.

A professional opinion of the manuscript's potential for acceptance by an agent/royalty-paying publisher, based solely on the focus of the material, may also be given if offered or requested.

3. Content Editing (aka Substantive Editing)

The content editor's main focus is on clarifying ambiguities, correcting conceptual problems, and maintaining the tone of the manuscript, ensuring that it's appropriate for the particular audience the author envisions it for.

A content editor

- reads through the manuscript and identifies problems with overall clarity or accuracy;
- evaluates the order in which the text is presented and recommends ways to reorganize paragraphs, sections, or chapters;
- identifies gaps in content or too much content;
- analyzes sentences for structure/syntax;
- suggests or provides clearer explanations, anecdotes, analogies, or illustrations;
- proposes additions or deletions of headings; and
- seeks to achieve clarity of subject, logic, and consistency.

The content editor checks for the following:

- readability and flow of information
- structural difficulties
- stylistic troubles
- sentence structure and rhythm
- cloudy explanations
- vague assumptions
- faulty logic
- errors of fact
- inconsistencies in information
- poor examples and analogies
- outdated content or content that doesn't adhere to the theme, tone, or marketing focus of the manuscript

For a fiction manuscript, a content edit may also include identifying problems with such things as the following:

- pacing
- plot
- dialogue

- point of view
- character development
- setting
- lack of conflict/tension
- too much (or too little) description

In general, the content editor does not fix problems, although confusing and awkward writing may be reworked. Long sentences may be enumerated or separated. Most of the time, the editor simply provides notations and detailed advice so the author can address them. Extensive changes or substantive reorganization can lead to additional content edits after the author refines the initial drafts.

4. Copyediting (aka Line-by-Line Editing)

A copyedit is a line-by-line review of the client’s manuscript. Copyediting can cover a broad range of corrections and suggestions. Different authors have different preferences and expectations for the level of editing desired.

Level 1. Basic (Light) Copyedit

A basic copyedit may include

- making sure material is logical and understandable;
- correcting continuity problems;
- making sure sources are cited for all statistics and quotations; and
- flagging inaccuracies (including incorrect spelling of song or book titles, proper names, dates, or well-known facts; extensive fact-checking is not supplied).

For fiction manuscripts, the editor will also mark inconsistencies in point of view and tense. (We’ll discuss this in greater detail in Lesson 7, “Tips for Editing Fiction.”)

The editor points out errors/issues to the client but does not rework awkward or unclear sentences/paragraphs. The editor may make suggestions to the author. For example:

- querying the author about all material that needs permission
- reminding the author to check spellings of names
- asking the author to recheck quotes and sources for accuracy

The author chooses what (and whether) to revise based on the editor’s comments.

Level 2. Moderate (Medium) Copyedit

In addition to all services listed under the Basic Copyedit, the copyeditor may review the manuscript for such things as the following:

- redundancies
- sentence clarity
- word choice
- maintenance of tone/voice

The editor may make minor changes and suggestions for rewriting, but extensive corrections are done by the author.

Level 3. In-Depth (Heavy) Copyedit

In addition to everything in the above two levels, an in-depth copyedit could also include

- a review for consistency of style and mood or presentation of content;
- analysis of the point of view chosen for each scene (fiction);
- cross-checking references, figures, tables, equations, etc. (nonfiction); and
- pointing out items that may require permission from the copyright holder.

An in-depth copyedit may involve preparing a style sheet. For nonfiction, this would include the format for chapter titles, headings, subheadings, text, footnotes, etc. For fiction, a timeline and list of characters (with details such as hair and eye color, birthday, height/build, and any other details mentioned in the text). The author may have developed a timeline and character sketches, which you can request to help you as you edit.

The editor makes corrections and detailed recommendations to the author, occasionally reworking awkward or unclear sentences/paragraphs without altering the author's intended meaning or style.

NOTE: An in-depth edit may scare off a client who is expecting a basic edit. You will need to tailor the level of editing to the demands and constraints of the project as well as the expressed wishes of the client.

5. Developmental Editing (aka Book Doctoring)

A developmental editor works closely with the client on a specific project from the initial concept, outline, or draft (or some combination of the three) through any number of subsequent drafts. The editor makes suggestions about content, organization, and presentation based on an analysis of competing works, comments of expert reviewers, the client's market analysis, and other appropriate references.

This type of edit includes all of the editing steps described above as well as minor rewriting, including:

- adjusting awkward sentences
- completing sentence fragments (where needed)
- reorganizing paragraphs and chapters for logical text flow

In addition, the developmental editor reviews a client's manuscript for the following:

- **Content organization.** May include a check for clarity and effectiveness of content or story sequence, including support and resolution.
- **Flow/transitions.** Examines the continuous progress and pace of the story/material.
- **Sentence structure.** Examines sentences for clarity, flow, and readability.
- **Presentation.** Reviews the visual organization and layout of the manuscript (placement of headers, lists, and sentence/paragraph spacing).

Developmental editors may do some basic research, as needed, sometimes suggesting topics or providing information about topics for the consideration of the client. They also assist the author in preparing a proposal that will stand out from the “slush pile” and grab an agent’s or acquisitions editor’s attention.

The main difference between this and a copyedit is that the editor makes more changes without querying the author. However, the editor still queries the client before making major corrections.

Many people like the term “book doctor” as they see this type of extensive editing to be like a physician who analyzes the patient for a particular condition, assesses the symptoms (diagnosis), recommends treatment options (prognosis), and occasionally performs surgery. However, the term has developed negative connotations for some authors (particularly those who have hired heavy-handed book doctors who have destroyed the author’s style, charged exorbitant fees, and still not come up with a manuscript that a publisher accepted). And you can’t sue a book doctor for malpractice if you’re unhappy with the outcome.

Writing Services

In addition to proofreading and editing, some editorial professionals offer related services.

1. *Rewriting*

In addition to copyediting and substantive editing, the editor rewrites existing text, notes, and/or transcriptions. No new material is developed or researched. All material must be provided by the author before the rewrite begins. The manuscript will receive an additional copyedit and proofread after changes have been made.

2. *Ghostwriting/Coauthoring*

A ghostwriter uses text, notes, outlines, and/or transcriptions provided by the client, then writes the manuscript, working closely with the author. New material is researched and developed or obtained from the author as needed. The author retains all rights and receives all royalties.

A coauthor works in conjunction with another author, both contributing equally to the material. Coauthors share rights and split royalties.

In the past, ghostwriters did not have their names listed with the authors’ on bylines. (Thus, the term *ghostwriter*.) Today, however, most ghostwriters are acknowledged in the byline (unless the author is a well-known celebrity and willing to pay the writer extra money to maintain anonymity and confidentiality).

Coauthored bylines use “and” (by Angela Hunt and Kathy Ide, for example—in my dreams!); ghostwritten bylines use “with” (by Michael Crawford with Kathy Ide—beyond my wildest dreams!).

3. *Mentoring*

A mentor works with a new/aspiring author, teaching writing and self-editing techniques. He or she assists with the preparation of a proposal and the search for an agent/publisher. A mentor performs many of the same services as a developmental editor/book doctor but works with the author through numerous projects over a long period rather than on a single manuscript. As the

mentor works on multiple projects with the author, he or she helps the client develop the skill and craft of writing and assists him or her in establishing a career as an author.

Related Services

1. Transcribing. Recorded messages submitted digitally or on CDs are transcribed to a computer document. No editing is provided, but basic proofreading is usually requested.

2. Data entry. Printed or typed text (on paper) is entered into a computer document. No editing is done, but page proofing is essential.

3. Indexing. The content of a manuscript is analyzed to determine what information is likely to be most useful to the readers. Create an index—an alphabetical list of references to important terms and concepts in the text. This work is usually done near the end of the project when the final layout is available.

4. Translating. Text written in one language is converted to another, with extreme care being taken to ensure that words, terms, and phrases accurately reflect the intended meaning of the original.

5. Research. The researcher finds reliable sources to back up claims made by the author in the text, provides documentation for all quoted material, determines where permission is needed for quoted material, and may assist in securing permission in accordance with copyright law. For fiction, a researcher ensures that all words, names, actions, and items used in the manuscript are appropriate for the time and place in which the story takes place.

Editors Get Paid

Whatever services you choose to provide, keep in mind that freelance editors get paid for their time, effort, and expertise. One of the first questions any new editorial freelancer asks is, “How much should I charge?”

This question has been discussed on The Christian PEN’s online discussion loop, so if you’re interested in finding out what’s been said, visit the archives. (If you’re not a member of The Christian PEN but would like to be, go to the website, www.TheChristianPEN.com, and click on the Membership tab.)

Some people feel more comfortable charging by the page or word; others charge by the hour. Many clients prefer a page or word rate so they know up front what the total is going to be. If you charge a per-page or per-word rate, be sure the client understands what he or she is getting for that rate.

My personal preference is to charge an hourly rate. I explain to potential clients that if their manuscript is well polished before they send it to me, they shouldn’t have to pay the same rate as someone who just whips off a rough draft and sends it to me without even so much as running spell-check. (Yes, that happens!) I also suggest that new clients start by sending me just a few chapters. They can learn from the recurring corrections and suggestions in that initial edit and

incorporate those things into the remaining chapters. That makes later edits take less time, which therefore costs them less money.

If you charge by the hour, the client may want to know how many pages you can get done in an hour. I sometimes do a sample edit of a few pages (no more than ten to fifteen minutes) to get a feel for an approximate page-per-hour estimate. But I let the client know that this is an estimate. The actual time may be more or less.

For average rates among professional editors, visit the Editorial Freelancers Association website at <https://www.the-efa.org/rates/>.

I also highly recommend that you get an estimated payment up front. Almost every time I've bent that rule, I've regretted it. (I've been stiffed by clients I would never have thought would do so.) At least get a partial payment up front, with the balance due before you send the edit to the client. These days, with PayPal, Venmo, Zelle, and other online payment forms, a client can pay right away if he's in a rush, so there's no reason to insist that the work be sent to the client without payment in advance. I tell my clients that if the edit costs less than the estimated up-front payment, we can apply the difference to future editing or a refund will be sent upon request.

Be aware that new writers may think you can get their manuscripts from rough draft to something agents and editors are going to clamor to get, all for that single rate you quote, not realizing how many times a piece may need to be edited. Therefore, you may need to advise them on the "next steps." For example, if you performed a copyedit, remind your client that once he/she has gone through the edits, the manuscript needs a proofread.

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LESSON #1 ASSIGNMENTS

Each lesson in this course will include one or more optional assignments. If you want to receive a Certificate of Completion at the end of the class, you need to complete the stated number of assignments for each lesson in the course.

Regardless of whether you wish to receive a certificate, you can learn a lot by doing the assignments in each lesson. For example, the optional assignment for this first lesson is to start creating a promotional piece that you can use in your editing business. Through each lesson, you will revise and refine that piece so that by the end of the class, you will have a polished piece to advertise your services.

If you have the time and wish to do so, consider what levels and types of proofreading, editing, and related services you feel qualified and comfortable offering to potential clients. Then create a promotional piece describing your services, expertise, contact information, etc. This could be, for example:

- a one-sheet (single 8.5" × 11" sheet you might hand out at writers' conferences)
- a two- or three-fold brochure
- a web page
- a print ad that could go in a magazine, newsletter, etc.
- a résumé for a position at a publishing house
- a template for an email you could send when someone contacts you about your services
- anything else you might wish to use to advertise your services

Don't use my wording. Come up with your own, based on your current knowledge of writing and editing, as well as a frank assessment of your skills, abilities, and areas of expertise. Keep in mind, these definitions are fluid even among editorial professionals, and many of the clients you'll be dealing with won't know the terms at all. So keep your descriptions simple and easy to understand. For more detailed information, direct them to your website—if you've included this information.

This doesn't have to be something you'll hand out to clients—at least not yet. If you're not ready to offer services to potential clients, just consider this a way for you to clarify, in your own mind, what types of editing/proofreading you would like to offer in the future and what you might feel comfortable offering at this point.

As we go through the course, you can revise your promotional piece as your understanding of the specifics increases. For now, this will be a basic template to work from (and something you can use right away if needed).

CLASS NOTE: Throughout the course, you are encouraged to read your classmates' posted assignments in the Google Group. This will give you more ideas about what you can do yourself. And please feel free to offer feedback on these assignments. If you read a classmate's work and think, *Wow, that's great*, post a message to the class saying so. If you notice something that you think could use some improvement but it's not something the whole class could benefit from, please email that individual personally with your constructive suggestions (given in a kind and

loving manner, of course). The Google Group can be an amazing tool to get to know one another as fellow editors, to encourage one another, and to share information. The more active you are on the forum, the more this course benefits all participants.