

# Hiring an Editor for Your Book

Looking for an editor to proofread your work? It's a smart move. A fresh set of eyes can find the sneaky typos you've missed. Someone who works with words will find spelling and punctuation mistakes before you lose credibility with an agent, a publisher, or your readers.

Before you spend your hard-earned money, take a moment to explore what an editor can do for you. Many a writer has spent a small fortune paying someone to proofread their work, only to realize much of it needed to be re-written anyway. What a waste! Keep in mind that proofreading takes at least twice as long as simply reading your manuscript—much longer if your work is rough. Please don't pay anyone to proofread anything but your final copy.

Here's a guide to the different options, and tips on how to get the most bang for your buck.

## 1. Evaluation

Is your story well told? Is it the best it can be? If you're not sure, ask for an evaluation. I'll help you decide whether your work needs fine-tuning (a copyedit), or major reorganization (a structural edit).

## 2. Structural Edit

When you ask me for a structural edit, I'll identify weaknesses in your story and suggest solutions. Here's what I'll be looking for. While there's no perfect formula for a good story, this checklist is a good start. Skip it if you like, but do come back later and have a look. You might spot some problems you'd like to fix before you send me your manuscript.

### *Writing*

- The level of writing is appropriate for the audience.
- The language is not overly complex or wordy.
- The tone is appropriate to the audience.
- Transitions are clear, graceful, and well placed.
- Sentences vary in length and structure.
- There are neither too many nor too few paragraph breaks.
- The writing contains strong images and active constructions.
- Any ambiguity is intentional.
- There is no redundancy or repetition (unless intentional).

### *Characters*

- Primary characters are compelling.
- Point of view is unobtrusive and accessible to the reader.
- Secondary characters do not overwhelm primary characters.
- Supporting characters are not given undue attention.
- Characters speak and behave in a manner consistent with their own back-stories.

### *Plot*

- The plot is compelling.
- The sequence of events is logical, effective, and linear (unless the work allows time travel).
- Information is introduced to serve a purpose.
- The piece has an effective beginning, middle, and end.
- There are no plot holes.

**You can save money by adding a tutorial.** *Some writers are quite happy to pay me to fix their spelling and punctuation—they just want to write. If that sounds like you, skip this bit:*

Get the most out of your structural edit by asking for me for a tutorial. (If it turns out you don't need one, I won't charge you.) If you tend to make the same errors over and over, I'll make a note of them and we'll spend a few moments on a mini-grammar lesson. That way, you can make your own corrections before we get to the copyedit or proofreading stage.

### 3. Format

When you plan to send your manuscript to an agent or a publisher, *presentation matters*.

Put yourself in their position: A pile of manuscripts sits on your desk. Most are double-spaced with generous margins and easy-to-read fonts, but this one has small margins. The writer has used a decorative but hard-to-read font, and the lines are too close together. You don't need the headache, so it goes to the bottom of the pile.

Don't let this happen to your manuscript.

It's up to you to make sure your manuscript gets treated with respect. I can make sure it's presentable, but you can save money by producing a professional-looking document before I ever get to see it. Even the most basic word processor has powerful features that are simple to use, once you know how. Ask a computer-savvy friend for tips, or borrow a book from the library.

Here's what publishers are looking for:

#### **Page formatting**

- Margins are at least one inch.
- Headers include the title, author's last name, and page numbers.

#### **Paragraph formatting**

- Text is set at 12 points, in an easy-to-read font.
- Paragraphs are indented and double-spaced.
- Extra white space between paragraphs is only used to indicate a change in point of view or a gap in time.

If you're going to convert your manuscript to a digital file for publication, check these too:

- Paragraph breaks—not line breaks—are used to separate paragraphs.
- Page breaks—not a series of paragraph breaks—have been used to begin new pages.

### 4. Copyedit and Proofread

**Please complete all structural revisions before requesting a proofread or copyedit.**

Are you sure you're finished revising and reorganizing? Now you're ready to fine-tune.

If you plan to self-publish, you will probably want a copyedit (with a *light* proofread) before you complete your book layout. Changes made while copyediting can make your words re-flow on the pages, pushing the last word in a chapter onto the next page or creating havoc with section breaks and captions. Adjusting *anything* can introduce new typos, so you'll want another thorough proofreading before going to print.

As with formatting, you can save money by doing much of this yourself. The fewer mistakes I have to correct, the less it will cost. So even if you just want to write, looking over this list will give you a better idea of what your editor is doing to earn her pay. Skip it if you like, but do come back and have a look.

#### **Spelling and Capitalization**

- Proper nouns, common words, and special terms are spelled and capitalized correctly.
- Shortened forms (abbreviations and acronyms) are spelled and capitalized correctly and defined when first used or as needed.
- Product names, trademarks, and registered trademarks are verified.
- Titles, including the first and last word, are capitalized correctly.
- Capitalization following colons in text is accurate:
  - Unless a proper name, lowercase when colon introduces less than a full sentence
  - Consistently lowercase (unless a proper name) *or* capital letter when colon introduces a single sentence
  - Capital letter when colon introduces two or more sentences

#### **Grammar**

- Subjects and verbs agree (*I work, he works*).
- Verbs are in correct tense (*I work, I worked, I had worked*, etc.).
- Pronouns agree in gender and number with what (or whom) they refer to (*Tom and Bill rode **their** bikes; the tree dropped **its** leaves*).
- Pronouns are correct according to their place in the sentence (*I gave it to **him**; he gave it to **me***).
- Adjectives and adverbs are placed to keep meanings clear (*I drive on Friday **only** [other days, I walk]; I **only** drive on Friday [and do nothing else all day]*).

## **Punctuation**

### General

- There is no missing punctuation.
- There is no duplicated or misplaced punctuation.
- Periods and colons are followed by only one space.

### Apostrophes

- Apostrophes are used only for possessives (Jane's) and missing letters (*I'll*; *rock 'n' roll*), not for plurals (*two Janes*; *1900s*).
- Apostrophes face the correct way ('04, not '04).

### Commas

- A comma is used before the last item in a series (*Tom, Dick, and Harry*), unless the chosen style omits it.
- A comma, without a connecting conjunction, is not used to separate two complete sentences. (Use stronger punctuation, like a period or semicolon, instead.)
- Parenthetical commas are used correctly.

### Dashes

- Em dashes (—) are used correctly—in pairs if they're in the middle of a sentence (consistently with spaces or not)—to set off words and are the width of a capital *M*.
- To replace the word *to* or *through*, an en dash (–) is used (with no spaces) to separate items in ranges (*London–Paris, 7 a.m.–9 a.m., 1999–2004*) and is half the width of an em dash.

### Hyphens

- Hyphenations and word divisions are correct.

### Parentheses and Brackets

- There are always opening *and* closing parentheses and brackets.

### Periods

- Period is *inside* parentheses when they enclose a separate and complete sentence.
- Period is *outside* parentheses when the parenthetical matter—even a complete sentence—is included in *another* sentence.

### Quotation Marks

- There are always opening *and* closing quotation marks as appropriate.
- Single quotation marks are used only around a quote within a quote.
- Periods and commas are inside quotation marks.
- Semicolons and colons are outside quotation marks.
- Other punctuation is inside or outside quotation marks, depending on whether it's part of the quoted item.

## **Lists**

- Numbered lists are used when sequence matters or items will be cited.
- Bulleted lists are used when sequence is unimportant and citation is unnecessary.

## **Figures, Graphs, and Art**

- Text references to figures, tables, and other elements are accurate and present as needed.
- Captions accurately describe graphics.

## **Sequence**

- Numbering in each numbered list is sequential and starts at 1 or A.
- Bulleted list items are in alphabetical order (unless another order makes more sense).
- Any section title numbering is consecutive.
- Heading levels (first, second, third, etc.) are styled correctly for the content they introduce.
- Numbered captions are in consecutive order.

## **Titles, Headers, and Footers**

- Titles and other headings accurately describe the content they introduce.
- Spelling and capitalization are correct and consistent:
  - First letter after a colon is capitalized.
  - First letter after an em dash or hyphen is capitalized or not, per style guidelines.

- Articles, short conjunctions, and short prepositions are lowercased, unless starting or ending a title, or contrary to style guidelines.
- First and last word are capitalized, regardless of part of speech.

### ***Table of Contents***

- Entries exactly match headings that appear in the document.
- All headings appear that should (all first-level, all second-level, etc.); none appear that shouldn't.

If your copyedited book has been converted into a book or ebook layout, we'll also check these:

### ***Page formatting***

- Margins are attractive and appropriate to printer's expectations.
- Front matter and end matter pages are inserted as per client's expectations.
- Headers (and/or footers) are consistent in placement and content.
- Header (and/or footer) fonts are appropriate to the tone of the book, and do not conflict with the body font.
- Content of headers (at the top of the page) and footers (at the bottom) is correct for each section.
- Page numbering is consecutive overall or within sections, as appropriate, and appears on all pages where it should.
- Widows and orphans have been handled appropriately.

### ***Paragraph formatting***

- Paragraph level styles are used consistently.
- Body font is easy to read and appropriate to the tone of the book.
- Paragraphs are indented or white spaced—not both.
- Additional white space is used with or without a symbol to between paragraphs to indicate a change in point of view or a gap in time.
- Hyphens are not stacked.

That's a long list, isn't it? Even the best editors sometimes need to make more than one pass through, focussing first on formatting issues and then on spelling, grammar and punctuation (or vice versa). You can see why I don't want you to hire me to proofread words you're not going to keep!

## **5. Cost estimate**

Unless you are made of money, you really need to know what the bottom line is going to look like. Brace yourself.

- The Writers' Union of Canada offers an evaluation service. (In 2008, they were charging \$125 for the first ten pages of your submission, plus \$2 each additional page. For 200 pages, that's \$505 plus GST). You'll get a detailed evaluation with suggestions to develop the manuscript, and responses to three specific questions (you provide these with your manuscript). This is not an editing service. It's similar to a basic structural edit.
- In 2008, the Professional Writers of Canada charged between \$30 and \$50 per hour for editing—which is pretty standard. According to their data, that meant from \$500 to \$20,000 per project. (No, that's not a typo: twenty *thousand* dollars.) Fortunately, your book should come in on the low end of that scale.

Editors often set a "per page" or "per word" rate. According to information gathered in 2005/2006, these rates ran from \$1 to \$6 per page. If the editor uses a per page rate, multiply that by the number of formatted pages; for a per word rate, use your word processing software's word count feature.

### ***By the hour, how much could it cost?***

Have a friend or family member keep track of how long it takes to read through your manuscript. (Anyone already familiar with your story will skim sections, so ask someone else.) Multiply the number of hours by the hourly rate. An evaluation would cost that much, plus at least an hour—the editor needs to share her findings.

If your editor has already done an evaluation, she should be able estimate how much an edit or proofread will cost. Without having done an evaluation, she will need to read through your manuscript at least once while pausing to make notes and suggestions. Double the time it took to read through, and multiply the number of hours by the editor's hourly rate. (If your work is complex or messy, triple or quadruple the time.)