

The Story Of A Story

The Editing Process

for fiction and non-fiction writing

This is the story of the editing process that every eBook should follow.

1. First Things First

Before you make any decisions about your next steps, it's essential that you understand what the entire editing process should achieve, and what fits in where, when, and why.

Otherwise, you run the danger of having to repeat stages, or of ending up with a less than professional manuscript.

A NOTE ON GENRE

Every beta reader and content editor has some genres with which they are very familiar, and others they don't know quite as well.

It's vital that you choose people who are comfortable with, and have experience in, your particular genre.

They will give you far better input.

Genre is not as important when it comes to line editing, copy editing, and proofreading. This is because these aspects of the editing process are focused on language and formatting, which are common to all genres.

EDITORS DIFFER

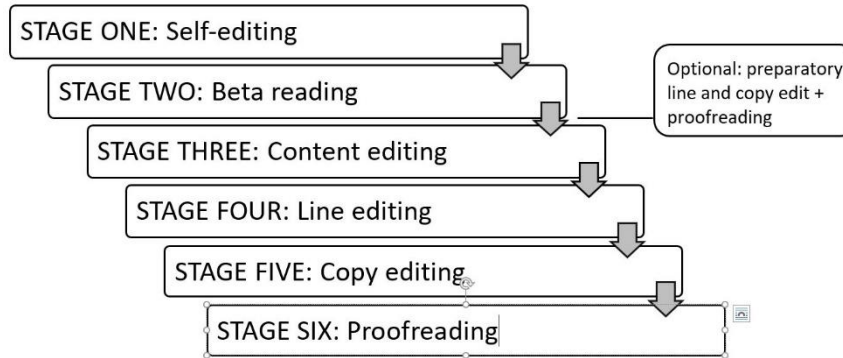
For example, some editors include copy editing with line editing, and do proofreading as well.

Check with an editor precisely what they include in the different stages—before you hire them. Also make sure you agree on timeframes before the editing goes ahead.

I would also insist on putting both in writing to make sure you both understand what's expected.

It's also a good idea to get a non-disclosure agreement from your editor. You've spent weeks and months, maybe years, putting your book together and you don't want to risk its confidentiality.

A SUMMARY OF THE EDITING PROCESS



2. Self-Editing

SELF-EDITING IS STAGE ONE

You've finished the first draft of your manuscript: congratulations!!

Self-editing is your next task and involves several stages of its own.

- Read through your manuscript and fill in any gaps you can find
- Put it through an editing programme like Grammarly or Hemmingway, to pick up basic spelling and grammatical errors. The free versions work fine because you'll have to get a real, qualified person to go through it anyway.
At a bare minimum, use your computer's built-in spelling and grammar check.
- Read your manuscript aloud to yourself, to identify errors you won't pick up with silent reading. *Don't skip this stage—it sounds weird, but it's extremely helpful.*
- Do a final spelling and grammar check

Don't stop here! Self-editing on its own is not enough, because it's very difficult to see your own mistakes.

Even professional editors—like me—use other people to do their more complex editing.

3. Beta Reading

BETA READING IS STAGE TWO

A beta reader will give you a summary of what works in your manuscript, and what could work better. Use beta readers who are familiar with and enjoy your genre, because they'll be able to report back most constructively.

Some people believe you should have more than one beta reader, to give you as much input as possible. My feeling is that more than two will mess with your head, and have you changing back the things you've already changed.

However, the decision is entirely up to you. If possible, talk to writers who've used one or two beta readers, and writers who've used more, to get an idea of the way you want to go.

Your beta reader/s should give you a written report of their findings with regard to the following aspects *if you're writing fiction*.

- Is the plot interesting: does it have enough depth?
- Does the story flow?
- Are there any bits missing?
- Are your characters well-developed, interesting, and do they have a purpose?
- Is the pace too slow, too fast, just right—or a combination of these?

If you're writing non-fiction your beta reader/s should give you a written report of their findings on the aspects that follow.

- Is your reason for writing the book clear, and does it reflect your pain and/or excitement?
- Is the research appropriate, farfetched or too technical?
- Does the book drag? Could parts be simplified or cut out?
- Does the book include interesting anecdotes, chapter summaries, action items, and helpful next steps?
- Are there any obvious, repeated grammatical, spelling, punctuation or capitalisation errors?

The report should give reasons, examples, and suggestions for all comments, so you do need someone who knows what they're doing.

4. Content Editing

CONTENT EDITING IS STAGE THREE

This stage is where you get detailed, specific input on how to improve the overall content of your manuscript to get it to professional, publishable quality.

Different terms for content editing

- Developmental editing
- Structural editing
- Substantive editing

This is not a stage you can skip if you wish to produce a high-quality eBook. *It's worth postponing your publishing date until you can afford an excellent content editor to do the job.*

Consider getting a line or copy edit, or even a proofread, done before your manuscript goes for content editing. *This will make the content editing phase far quicker, simpler and cheaper, although it won't replace the later line and copy edits.*

An excellent content editor will ***work with you to make sure your book turns out the way you intended.*** Writers sometimes misunderstand this aspect and feel their content editor is out to get them. The more red marks there are on your manuscript, the happier you should be. Each one is getting you a step further towards a publishable book.

Your ***fiction*** content editor will:

- advise you on how to improve everything from point of view through characterisation and voice to theme, scene, and plot
- suggest any restructuring, rewriting or deleting that is indicated

Your ***non-fiction*** content editor will:

- examine things like organisation, flow, clarity, and tone, and give you suggestions about how you can improve these
- suggest any restructuring, rewriting or deleting that is indicated

NOTE: Some content editors include line editing as part of their service.

My strong advice is that you give careful consideration to all the suggestions your content editor makes.

You may differ on some aspects, but don't reject changes for emotional reasons. If you've chosen a really good content editor, he or she will be right much of the time.

Think about using one person to do your content editing, and another to do your line and copy editing. *You definitely want more than one person to work with you on your book because each gives a slightly different perspective, and each will see things that the other/s may have missed.*

5. Line editing

LINE EDITING IS STAGE FOUR

After the content edit, your next stage is the line edit. A good line editor will identify and correct:

- wrong or repetitive word usage
- clichés that don't work
- unsuitable tone
- clumsy or repetitive sentence structure
- ambiguity
- minor inconsistencies; for example, the colour of a character's hair, or the name in a case study
- ineffective paragraph structure
- pretty much anything else that crops up

Remember that editors differ, so be sure you know what your editor includes or doesn't.

6. Copy Editing

COPY EDITING IS STAGE FIVE

A copy editor works with your text to make sure your final draft is clear, concise and consistent, and free of silly mistakes.

This includes:

- grammar, spelling, and punctuation
- typos
- standardising things like capitalisation and use of hyphens
- basic fact-checking, such as dates
- only if appropriate, making sure the formatting is correct: things like paragraph spacing, indents, font and so on

NOTE: Most copy editors don't do eBook formatting. That is the job of a professional eBook formatter.

7. Proofreading

PROOFREADING IS STAGE SIX

The proofread is the final tidy-up of your book, after any eBook formatting and before publication.

The proofreader goes over almost everything that a copy editor does. He or she double-checks that your manuscript is ready for you to hit 'publish', knowing you've done the best job possible.

It may be a good idea to consider getting a final proofreading done by someone who's unfamiliar with your work—someone who didn't do your other editing. They will pick up any last errors more effectively than people who've had lots of contact with it. If you want the same person to do your final proofread, they will need a break after completing the editing.

8. At Last

YOUR EDITING IS DONE

More congratulations!!

9. Summary

1. Self-editing (done by you)
2. Beta reading (one or more beta readers)
3. *Optional, to save time and money on the content edit:* line and copy editing, and proofreading (all this could be done by one line/copy editor/proofreader)
4. Content editing (a professional content editor)
5. Line and copy editing (all this can be done by one line and copy editor)
6. Final proofread (a different proofreader, unless you're going to give your editor a break first)

IF YOU'RE ON A BUDGET

1. Self-editing (done by you)
2. Beta reading (see my blog post on finding free beta readers: <https://www.justemagine.biz/single-post/2018/03/05/Do-I-have-to-pay-for-a-Beta-Reader>)
3. Discuss with your content editor what discount you could get by doing a line and copy edit beforehand. If it will be cost-effective, then do it (try to use one line editor who includes copy editing in the price)
4. I have to say again; it's a good idea to delay your publishing until you can afford all these steps. Your readers will learn from the very start that you're right up there with the professional authors.

If you feel you cannot wait, at the very least get someone to do beta reading, and someone else to do line editing, copy editing and proofreading before you publish.

10. How To Find Me

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