

# Editing or proofreading your novel

So, you've written a novel and want to move to getting it published. You know you need professional help to polish the manuscript, but you're not sure what you need. Let's look at your options.

## How ready are you?

Is your book still at the draft stage? Have you already had it edited by a copy-editor and are now looking for a final proofread? Or do you just want someone professional to read through it and give you some guidance?

## Send a sample

I ask for a sample chapter in the first instance – ideally around 10 pages from the middle of the novel. This will help me assess what I think you need.

I will be honest with you if I think you are not ready for any professional help yet. I have often looked at sample chapters where the novelist needs to hone their writing skills. If this is the case, I will suggest you work more on your manuscript first, using a writers' forum for peer review, before you hire an editor. Peer feedback can be immensely useful for improving your writing – both style and structure – and will keep the cost of editing down when you are really ready for it later on, as your manuscript will need less work by that stage.

- I won't take your money if you're not ready to spend it.

## Critique

You may realise that you need to have a professional critique of your manuscript – you want to know if what you're writing is working or not and the areas you should pay more attention to. The goal of a critique is to help the author realise their vision. So a critique is generally the start of a process that requires many exchanges between author and editor, and you can expect the editor to ask a lot of questions. You may not know the answers, but the questions will help you think about where and how to improve your manuscript.

The critique (sometimes also called a developmental edit) is an early stage in the creation of a novel – too soon to consider proofreading, or even a straightforward copy-edit, which should only happen when you're close to being ready to publish. This is not the time to worry about your grammar or spelling. It is the time to structure your story.

The editor will advise on the following, and more:

- An overview of the shaping and narrative – how does it flow?
- How rounded and credible are the characters?
- Is the dialogue natural?
- Could chapters and sections be better organised?
- How is the plot developing?
- Is the language consistent, does it have clarity?
- Do you show, not tell?

When I provide a critique, I read through the manuscript then I write you an in-depth, comprehensive report that examines all the above. My critique will note both passages and sections that work well, plus problematic areas and I offer guidance for fixing issues and improving the text.

How long does it take? It depends, but typically I'd expect 300 pages to take 20-25 hours. I usually do two read-throughs, making notes as I go as well as marking up the manuscript, then write my report, which is generally around 5-6 pages. I also offer a mini critique – I do a single read-through and provide a two-page summary of what work needs doing, in my opinion. I won't do a manuscript mark-up but my summary will look at plot, narrative, dialogue, flow, characters, legal issues (defamation), etc.

- Spending money on a critique now – whether you choose me or another editor – will save you money for a proper proofread at the stage you are actually ready to publish.

### Editing

Also called line-editing or copy-editing, this is where the editor does the actual corrective work – what is often called “fixing and flagging”. The following are the issues the editor will typically fix and flag:

- correcting spelling, punctuation and grammar
- correcting typos
- rewriting sentences to read better
- checking for plot holes
- checking plot timelines
- checking character consistencies (name, clothing, job, backstory, etc)
- fact-checking for place names and their geography, historical events that are mentioned, etc
- flagging possible defamation of real-life persons
- ensuring all loose ends are tied up
- leaving margin comments for anything else that needs attention

Editors typically work in Word, using Track Changes so you can see what has been amended and make your own decision post-edit what changes to accept or reject.

- I supply two copies of the manuscript on completion: one with all changes tracked and margin comments visible, and one “clean” with changes accepted so the author can read the amended version easily.

### Proofreading

This is the last stage before publication and should really be the final polish after you have had your book edited and you have made any further amendments. The proofreader will typically amend the following:

- spelling
- punctuation
- grammar
- typos
- any other small issues to be brought to the author's attention

This is what many editors and proofreaders call a “SPaG plus”. If you need more than this, you should consider paying for editing first – a good proofreader should advise you on this and not take your money to fix the above when it’s clear the manuscript has deeper issues to resolve.

### How much will it cost?

Any experienced editor or proofreader, including myself, won’t give you a quote sight unseen, because it’s impossible to give a price and timescale without seeing a sample of the text. The quality of English I see from various authors can vary considerably so some novels need more work than others.

The short answer is ... it depends.

Expect to pay a fixed fee for a critique. For editing and proofreading, there are so many variables to take into consideration that it’s unlikely that anyone will give you a firm price until they know exactly what the job will entail. Expect to be asked the following questions:

- What level of editing do you need?
- How long is your text?
- Can I see a sample of your work?
- What is your schedule? How quickly do you need it?

The Chartered Institute of Editing and Proofreading has [suggested minimum rates](#), but these are only suggestions, and you may find that an experienced professional will charge more. On average, you can expect to pay around £20-25 per hour for proofreading and £30-40 per hour for editing, depending on the factors we’ve talked about. For more detailed information, ask for my factsheet on pricing, “What will it cost?”

### When do I pay my editor?

For a one-off job such as proofreading a novel be prepared to pay your editor in advance. This may be a deposit or the full amount. If you are a returning client, your editor will probably be more flexible about payment terms.

- For self-publishers and independent authors, I ask for 50% upfront and 50% on completion, to be paid within 7 days.