

Hi! I'm Jessica Allowski, founder of Cozy Cottage Editing. I work primarily with introverted indie authors to strengthen and refine their manuscripts for self-publication. I'm here to describe the main types of editing and offer tips for finding the most suitable freelance editor for your project.

When you're trying to figure out what types of editing you need, remember that revision usually moves from bigger changes to smaller ones. Writers are often advised to draft without worrying about wording, grammar, or spelling early on because who wants to throw out a polished scene when you realize the story is stronger without it? The writing and revision process is not always linear, of course, but moving from general to specific as much as possible can save you a lot of time and money.

Here are the types of editing you might find helpful as you prepare your work for self-publication:

Developmental editing

The first and usually most expensive category of editing is developmental. (It overlaps with structural, content, and substantive editing, and often these terms are used interchangeably.)

Developmental editing deals with the big picture, like content, organization, plot, characterization, pacing, and point of view. If you write nonfiction, it addresses subject matter, argument, structure, supporting points, and use of research. A developmental editor will read through your manuscript, make marginal comments along the way, and write an in-depth editorial report with potential problems and advice for how to address them.

Many editors also offer manuscript evaluations or critiques. A manuscript evaluation is not as comprehensive or solution-based as developmental editing, but it is a good way to get professional feedback on your project as a whole with a smaller budget.

When you are satisfied with your big content and structural decisions, you are ready for line editing and copyediting.

Line editing

A line editor improves writing on a line-by-line basis. Through tracked changes, marginal comments, and an editorial letter, line editors help you express your ideas or narrative to readers in a clear and effective way. It may involve switching words around, adding or removing details, consolidating sentences, or suggesting a different paragraph or sentence structure. It's not about fixing mistakes as much as improving readability. Line editing strengthens style, or the way you deliver your content—your voice, tone, rhythm, pacing, word choice, sentence length, and word order.

Copyediting

As you're looking into editing services, you may see the word *style* used in different ways, which can get a little confusing. I spoke of line editing as strengthening writing style, or the way you express yourself in writing.

But copyediting deals with *another* type of style: grammar, usage, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, formatting, and citation if needed—guidebook and dictionary stuff. How the writing *looks*. What style guide do you use—is it Chicago, Associated Press, APA, MLA, or something else? What dictionary are you using? Merriam-Webster Collegiate, Oxford English? This usually depends on

your genre, field, or audience, but one of the advantages of self-publishing is you, the author, have the final say on your style choices. Sometimes deviating from a convention is the better choice. It depends on the situation. As an editor, I love consistency, but it's not always practical or best. This is where you, with your editor's help, weigh the options and come to a decision.

Using the preferred combination of guidelines, the copy editor will create your *style sheet*, or a document listing important elements of your manuscript—for example, settings, timelines, characters, proper nouns, and punctuation conventions. In a way, the style sheet is a mini style guide for your book.

A copy editor will, like a line editor, track edits in the manuscript, include comments, queries, and suggestions in the margins, and write an editorial letter that discusses strengths and areas for improvement.

A note on proofreading

Many people use the terms *editing* and *proofreading* interchangeably, but these jobs occur at different points of the process and address the writing at different levels.

Proofreading is the very last stage before publication, preferably in the manuscript's final formatted version—the *proof*. The proofreader scours the almost-ready manuscript for small, sneaky errors and inconsistencies to ensure a polished written product. Many proofreaders will not proofread an unedited manuscript because it's not ready for them to do the task they have been hired to do. There is simply too much editorial work that needs to be done first.

How to choose a type of editing

- While hiring every type of editor I've discussed will most likely give you the strongest version of your project, this may not be financially viable for you or fit your timeline. In that case, figure out what areas you need the most professional help with and invest in those types of editing.
 - For instance, do you suspect your story lags a bit in the middle or peters out at the end? Developmental editing would help strengthen your structure and pacing.
 - Is your writing somewhat wordy and confusing to your early readers? Line editing will improve its readability and keep readers immersed in what you're saying.
 - Is your story exactly how you want it to be? Have you gotten feedback from others, revised numerous drafts, self-edited, and read the most recent version straight through? You may want to invest in copyediting at this point.
- Copyediting is *always* a good idea, for every writer—debut authors, skilled novelists, grammarians, experienced editors . . . The work done (or not done) at that stage is the most noticeable when a reader first approaches your work.

How to find an editor

- Organizations such as the Editorial Freelancers Association or the American Copy Editors Society have online directories for finding an editor who is right for you. You can search by genre, specialty, type of editing, and so on, or you can post your job to have interested editors contact you.
- You can also find freelance editors on Instagram, Facebook, and other social media platforms. Follow them, read their posts, see what past clients have said, and decide whether their editing philosophy suits your writing

goals. See if they specialize in your genre. They'll have a better idea of the narrative patterns, language, and tropes commonly found in the type of writing you do.

- Seek editor recommendations from other self-published authors. A fellow writer's positive experience with an editor or editing service doesn't necessarily mean they'll be a good fit for you too, but you'll probably get some strong leads from writers who have gone through this process before.
- If an editor catches your interest, review their website to get a sense of their background, personality, values, specialities, and specific services. Note, too, whether they mention how many passes—or rounds of editing—are included in each service. Quicker jobs might give one pass, but more thorough and collaborative editors commonly offer two.
- If you're interested, email them to request a sample edit, a cost estimate, and an idea of their availability. Many freelance editors' calendars get filled up months in advance, so try to reserve a spot early on.

Use your intuition when evaluating potential editors or editing businesses.

Here are some signs you're likely to have a good working relationship with an editor.

They . . .

- treat writers as equals,
- avoid belittling anyone about language or grammar conventions,
- are open to their clients' input,
- can put aside their ego for the good of a project, and
- aim to elevate the writer's craft without completely changing their voice.

You deserve an editor who suits both you and your project. A little research up front can improve your chances of finding a pleasant, constructive editing experience with an editor who shares your values and respects your goals.

Best of luck!

If you're an introvert who is planning to self-publish, you might want to take a peek at my website, cozycottageediting.com. I offer line editing, copyediting, and proofreading for fiction and nonfiction, as well as online courses. If I'm not the right editor for you, I can help you find someone who is!