

The Spectrum of Proofreading and Editing: Whereabouts on the scale is your project?

“But I don’t need an editor!”

Quite possibly you feel you don’t, but there are different degrees of editing, and they can all add value, whether to your business document or the manuscript of your book. Let’s start with the most basic level; proofreading. These days, we all have spellcheck on our computers and possibly a grammar-checking tool as well. Nevertheless, critical errors can often slip through undetected.

1 LEVEL 1

“Dear Booby,” the email began innocently. Unfortunately, the recipient was called Bobby, and this was not the first time he had been addressed this way! For an important business email, you can’t afford this kind of mistake. There, their and they’re are also simple words which are commonly mixed up and change the whole meaning of a sentence. Running a document through a translating app is another shortcut which is also full of risk. A fashion piece I worked on about trousers had translated the French word for ‘mankind’ to ‘manhood’. Not the word the writer wanted associated with their article.... An email or document may only take your proof-reader 15 minutes, and it’s time and money well spent if you want your work to be professional.

2 LEVEL 2

Then we move up a level to where editing is added. Have you got a sentence that runs for three lines that could be more elegantly cut down to two shorter sentences? For an article and for a book, is the style of writing appropriate for the audience? Do you repeat a word too often in the

space of a paragraph? One author had unwittingly used the word ‘grim’ to describe almost everything a character did. After the word repeatedly came up, with him speaking grimly, clenching his hands grimly and looking grim, well, the character was getting rather.... dark. After many weeks and months on a draft, you can be so immersed in your draft’s details that your big-picture perspective is lost.

3 LEVEL 3

Line Editing is usually the final phase for a large document or a manuscript before it is published or goes to print. It’s the last stage and it’s a critical one – this is your chance to catch any last errors in the net. This is also a very good point to call in an editor, especially if you have not used one before. If you have been working on the draft for a long time, mistakes creep in and you can easily be blind to them. One author had a main character in their novel who was described as having blue eyes, yet there was one mention of him having brown eyes. A tiny thing, but it’s a careless distraction for your reader from an otherwise great story. In a professional document, you would be surprised at how easily a director’s name can be misspelled or an outdated statement from the previous year is mistakenly left in. These small errors make you and your company look sloppy, and this then makes the reader question your credibility.

4 LEVEL 4

Developmental editing, or in-depth editing, is much more involved and usually applies to manuscripts or longer pieces. This is a lot more than correcting and polishing; this can be a fundamental overhaul of the story, it could involve rearranging chapters, it could require

sections to be re-written. This is the chance, however, for you to get valuable feedback from somebody who’s not a relative or friend, and insight into how a stranger would react to your writing. There could be a vital hole in the plot, a character could be significantly improved or even deleted from the narrative. This kind of editing has the potential to turn your tale from a mere shrug into spectacular.

5 LEVEL 5

Finally, there is the level of editing that is the most intense and it’s actually where most of the writing is done for you. Perhaps you have a brilliant idea, or piles of notes, journal entries and material but no clue how to bring them together into the epic chronicle you have in mind. It may even be your life story and you want somebody to tell it in your voice, from your point of view. Well beyond standard editing, this enters the realm of ghost-writing. At this level, your editor or writer is your collaborator and the one who you work closely with to bring your story into reality.

At what stage on the spectrum could your project use editorial help? Are you in need of someone to take charge and organise the whole manuscript for you? Is your first draft complete and it needs an honest examination? Have you got your story all written and need a fresh pair of eyes to correct and clear any errors? Or perhaps your piece simply needs that last polish before it’s sent out into the world. Take that step and involve your editor, allow them to take your good work and burnish it to brilliance. Your editor is your most candid critic, your encouraging coach, your secret weapon, and your essential ally.

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Here's how an editor can add value to your written work, whether it's a simple email or the next great novel. Where does your project fall on the Spectrum of Editing?

