Chartered Institute of Editing and Proofreading

Proofreading or Editing?

A quick guide to using editorial professionals

The Chartered Institute of Editing and Proofreading (CIEP) is a non-profit body promoting excellence in English language editing. We set and demonstrate editorial standards, and we are a community, training hub and support network for editorial professionals – the people who work to make text accurate, clear and fit for purpose.

We aim to be:

- a recognised authority on editing and proofreading in English
- a supportive community for editorial professionals who are working to high standards
- a trusted source of advice, information, best practice, training and qualifications
- the place to find professional editorial services.

We have around 3,000 editorial professional members in the UK and beyond, with a growing international membership, who work for a wide range of clients – publishers, businesses, government and other organisations, academic institutions and authors. We formed in 1988 and were known as the Society for Editors and Proofreaders before being awarded our Royal Charter in 2019.

Proofreading or Editing?
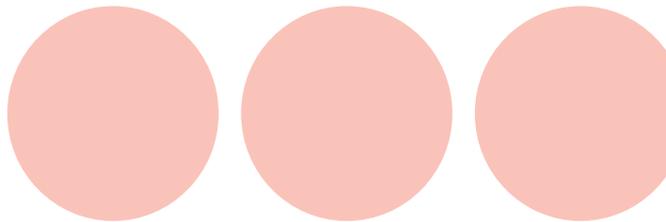
A quick guide to using editorial professionals

The information in this work is accurate and current at the time of publication to the best of the author's and publisher's knowledge, but it has been written as a short summary or introduction only. Readers are advised to take further steps to ensure the correctness, sufficiency or completeness of this information for their own purposes.

Contents

1| What? I should *pay* for fixing typos?

Why it pays to use a professional editor or proofreader

Unless they're in the business, most people don't *really* know what editors and proofreaders do. But why would they? In fact, it's not surprising at all, since most people don't get to *see* what we do.

What you see – in a book, a magazine article, a website, a business report, or any other written text material – is the *finished result*. But most texts go through a number of rounds of drafting and revision before they are finished – work that is (hopefully) invisible to the reader.

But I thought I just needed someone to check my spelling and grammar?

There's a lot more to good editing and proofreading than you might think. That's why it pays to use a properly trained and experienced editorial professional. They'll do the job efficiently and, importantly, they'll do only what's right for *your* text and your aims in publishing it.

Yes, correcting spelling (and grammar and punctuation) errors is important, but it's just one part of a much bigger quality check that editors and proofreaders do.

See the example text on the next pages showing the kinds of things that an editor does to add value to your writing.

Some examples of what an editor does

Edited text	What did the editor do?
What is copyediting?	Correct **heading level** applied Applied preferred spelling, which is no **hyphen** (not copy-editing)
'Copy' is any text to be published, from a company report, to a novel, to a T-shirt slogan.	**Punctuation** consistency: single (not double) quotation marks applied throughout **Spelling** of T-shirt agreed
Copyediting is professional help to make a text ready for publication by ensuring that it's clear, consistent, correct and complete.	**Correct words**: changed writer's error of 'insuring' to 'ensuring' Checked **meaning**: it's (=it is), not its (=belonging to it)
Copyediting focuses on the detail of a text:	Spelling **preferences**: focuses not focusses
1. Agreeing final content.	**Number formats** made consistent (number plus stop then space) Checked that all numbers run sequentially
2. Making sure it reads well for its intended purpose.	
3. Applying consistency to the language and formatting.	
Once a text has been copyedited it's ready for the next stage: design and layout.[1]	Moved **footnote** markers *after* punctuation, which is the usual convention Made all footnote markers superscript
What do copyeditors do?	Applied correct heading level style
Copyeditors help the writer by, for example:	Checked that all **lists** have an introductory colon, which is the style preference of this author

1 Some people call this typesetting.

• correcting or querying anything that seems to be an error, including misspelt words, misused words, numbers that don't add up or follow in sequence, incomplete or missing references or sources, and parts that don't make sense	**Style preference**: replaced 'which' with 'that' Spelling preference: 'misspelt' is the preference, not 'misspelled' Checked that contractions (eg don't) are suitable for the readership
• suggesting ways to reduce the length of a text or use the available space better.	**List style** checked: preference is for lower-case letters at the start of list items, and a full stop on only the last list item
They help the publisher by, for example:	Amended for **plain English** ease of reading: to spell out 'for example' instead of using the abbreviation 'e.g.'
• highlighting possible legal issues such as plagiarism or breach of copyright, libel, obscenity or incitement to racial hatred.	**Serial comma** *not* used (which would be 'libel, obscenity, or incitement') as this is the main style preferred
They help the designer by, for example:	**Consistency**: checked that this list is introduced with parallel wording to the one above
• marking up the document's structure and features, including headings, boxed text, illustrations, displayed quotes, and special characters such as accents.	**Serial comma** *is* used to avoid tripping up the reader (no comma after 'displayed quotes' could be read as displayed … special characters)
What do copyeditors not do?	Checked heading level is correct and consistent
A good place to find a reliable copyeditor is in the CIEP Directory.	**Capitalisation**: style preference is for title case (initial capitals) for the name of the Directory

I have some questions

Do I need an editor or proofreader or both?

Most people know the term 'proofreading' and associate that with the task of correcting written texts. In fact, proofreading is just one stage of the whole editing process. It's important to find someone who's a good fit for the job you need done.

If you've already tried looking for an editor or proofreader, you'll know that there are lots of different descriptions and labels, not only for the people who do this work, but also for the many different editing-related tasks. As with any field of expertise, practitioners have different skills and experience, and tend to do different jobs in the editing process.

Take a look at our infographic that summarises who does what. We hope it helps you work out who to ask and what service to ask for.

Editorial help for writers

PLAN AND DEVELOP

TASKS

The big picture. You're not fixing detail at this stage, such as grammar and spelling. Look at the overall content and structure of your work. Have you included everything? Is it written in the right tone for your readers?

WHO?

- Development(al) editor
- Structural editor
- Substantive editor
- Content editor
- Manuscript critique
- Review/appraisal
- Beta/test reader
- Sensitivity reader

FIX THE DETAIL

A **copyeditor** reads every word and sentence in detail to fix grammar, punctuation, spelling, consistency, and more. There may be a lot of changes at this stage, so it needs to happen *before* final design or layout.

- Copyeditor
- Line editor
- Proof-editor

FINALISE AND PUBLISH

Your text may have *several* rounds of editing before it's ready for final preparation. **Proofreading** happens *after* layout/formatting so that the proofreader can check not just the words but also that everything appears as it should on the page.

- Proofreader
- (Graphic) designer
- Formatter
- Ebook formatter
- Cover designer
- NB some editors also offer layout services

Do tasks in the right order to publish your text well:

| PLANNING, WRITING AND SHAPING | CORRECTING AND POLISHING | QUALITY CONTROL | PUBLISH |

Will an editor make my text perfect? Otherwise, why bother paying someone?

There's no such thing as perfect when it comes to writing, and no two editors will edit your text in quite the same way. That's because, despite what you may have heard or been taught at school, there are very few 'rights' and 'wrongs' in good editing.

| *Consistency, clarity and context are key.*

A good editor will know what's a rule or convention and what's simply a preference that you can choose. They will work with you to get your message across in an appropriate way for your intended readership.

Did you know?

- It's a myth that –ise spellings are British and –ize ones US English.
- To hyphenate or not largely comes down to preference.
- You don't need a capital 'I' on 'internet' or a hyphen in 'email'.
- It's fine to boldly split an infinitive if it's right for your text.
- Singular 'they' has been used since at least the 16th century.
- And you can start a sentence with a conjunction.

I've heard editors are like grammar police – will I be embarrassed at all my mistakes?

A good editor or proofreader should never embarrass you. It's part of our training to learn how to deal with author queries and amendments sensitively. We know that you've spent time and effort getting your draft written. We're not out to judge you; our job is to make constructive suggestions for improving your text.

Don't confuse trained editorial professionals with amateur 'know-it-alls' who shame people's spelling and punctuation on social media.

What if I don't want someone interfering with the way I write?

Experienced editors should not change your tone of voice or writing style (unless it's not right for your intended readership). We work with many clients and genres, and these invariably have different requirements and preferences, so we adapt how and what we edit to fit the job.

But it's always valuable to have a fresh eye read what you've written to make sure that you're communicating effectively. You know what you intended to convey, but is that how it comes across to others?

You know what you intended to convey, but is that how it comes across to others?

2| Finding the right editorial professional

How do I find a good editor or proofreader?

Lots of people can spot a typo. Not so many can artfully and carefully work with you to help your writing fly.

At the moment, anyone can call themselves an editor or proofreader. There's no regulation, as there is for, say, accountants and other professionals. We hope that, in future, by becoming a chartered institute, we'll be able to provide easier ways for users of editorial services to recognise good editors and proofreaders.

For now, ask lots of questions before you hire someone, so that you know you've got the right person for you, and so that you're confident about what they'll do with your text and how you'll work together.

Use our free Directory

A good place to start is the **CIEP Directory**. It's free to search, and it lists people in our top two levels of membership, which means they've had to show us evidence of their skills training and practical experience to be awarded that grade.

You'll still have to do your own checks to make sure that the person you hire is right for you and your project.

On the next page are some pointers to help wth your choice.

- **Professional credentials:** Membership of a professional association shows a commitment to getting things right and working to a high standard. Have a look at the organisation's website to see what it means. The CIEP has four membership grade levels, from those just starting out to those who are highly experienced: Entry Level, Intermediate, Professional and Advanced Professional.

- **Training:** What training has the editor done? If you're having a gas boiler fitted, do you go for the engineer who's trained in gas safety with a recognisable badge, or a friend up the road who does it as a hobby? You may get a different outcome …

- **Subject matter:** While some editors do work on a wide range of topics, it's best to find someone who has the right skills and experience for the text you're writing. Editing fiction (novels), for example, is a very different task from editing financial reports.

- **Testimonials:** Can you see evidence of happy clients? Look for credible testimonials, a portfolio, and listings and reviews in respected directories. Remember though that professional editors respect client confidentiality, so don't expect real 'before and after' examples, or even client names in some sectors.

- **Helpfulness:** You're going to need trust and a good working relationship with your editor, so your first communications should give you an idea of whether you're going to connect well. A good editor should explain what they can do for you (and what they can't) in a way you can understand.

But you need to do your bit too: be respectful of the editor's expertise and assessment of what your text needs, and provide the information your editor needs to give you a price and time estimate.

What will it cost?

Editors can't give you a price or time estimate unless you provide some basic **information** about your text and your publishing aims, including:

- Is your text fiction or non-fiction?
- What is the subject matter?
- Who will read the text (your intended audience)?
- How many words is it in total (including in figures/tables, notes and references)?
- What is your deadline for having the work completed?
- Has anyone other than you read or commented on it?

Editors also need to see a **sample** of your work so that they can check what your text needs and give you advice on the best way forward. Without a sample, they're just guessing.

They may also wish to know if you have a rough **price** in mind – it takes time to assess a text and work out an estimate, so if you're not in the same ballpark, it's a waste of time for both of you.

Maybe your budget won't stretch to paying for everything that could be done to enhance your text. An experienced editor will advise what is achievable within your budget and suggest ways for you to deal with other aspects yourself (or accept them as 'good enough').

Trust your editor's assessment of what tasks are needed to achieve your publishing aims, then have a conversation about who will do what, by when and what you'll pay.

You may find it useful to look at our **suggested minimum rates** for editorial work. But remember that ultimately price is a business negotiation between the parties. Each job is different and the price is influenced by various factors.

ciep.uk/resources/suggested-minimum-rates

3| Can I become an editor?

If you think you've got what it takes to be a professional editor or proofreader, we'd love to welcome you to our community.

Like any new profession, you'll need to **invest time and money** in equipping yourself with the tools, knowhow and practicalities for the job. Here's how to get started.

Join the CIEP

We would say that, wouldn't we? 🙂 But don't just take our word for it. Many of our members say it's the best thing they did to get their career off the ground, and to keep it going.

What better way to learn than from people who've done it before? Our members freely and gladly help each other with answers to questions, practice tips, sources of knowhow, suggestions on whether to comma or not … and much more in our online forums and our local groups.

> *I feel certain that I would not have been able to develop my skills as effectively or find work so regularly had I not been a member, and I'd urge anyone working as a proofreader or editor to join.*

Ian Howe

You can watch a short video of our members talking about the value of our forums at: **youtu.be/H-M9MD3H_RQ**.

Get training and do some reading

We often hear people new to the profession say they didn't know what they didn't know until they started training! Because we all use words and read, it can be a real eye-opener to find out all the work that goes on behind the scenes to make a text fit for publication.

We advise everyone wanting to work as an editorial professional, whether as a freelancer or in an employed role, to get up-to-date training in the basics from a respected provider, then continue developing your skills and knowhow throughout your career with CPD.

It's a crowded marketplace out there, so you're going to have to stand out to get work, and to keep it. And, if you're going to be taking money for editorial services, you'd better know what you're doing.

We offer a range of editorial skills training courses and short booklets written specifically about running an editorial business.

See the help section in this booklet for recommended courses and resources.

Get business skills

If you're planning to go it alone as a freelancer, remember it's not just editing skills you need – **you'll be running a business**. That means it's up to you to get up to speed on business planning, record-keeping, time management, IT, admin and … *marketing*.

There's no avoiding it, unless you're *really* lucky and have a vast network of contacts already queuing up to give you work. There are lots of places to learn good business skills, so use them.
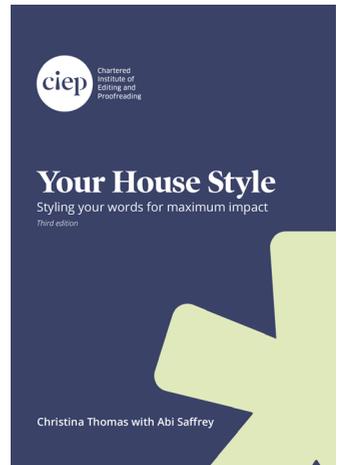
Join the conversation

The CIEP has an active social media presence, where we post tips on language and on editing and proofreading. You're welcome to follow our pages and join in our conversations.

If you want to establish yourself as an editorial professional, being active on social media – and posting useful content that will help others – is one way of getting yourself noticed.

facebook.com/EditProof

twitter.com/The_CIEP

linkedin.com/company/the-ciep

4| I need help!

Useful links and resources

You'll find lots of information about proofreading, copyediting and using editorial professionals on the CIEP website:

ciep.uk

In particular, you may find the following helpful:

The CIEP Directory: ciep.uk/directory

CIEP training courses: ciep.uk/training

CIEP guides: ciep.uk/resources/guides

Recommended reference books: ciep.uk/resources/recommended-reference-books

Editing and proofreading FAQs: ciep.uk/about/faqs

And here are some useful courses run by other organisations:

PTC training courses: publishingtrainingcentre.co.uk/courses

Publishing Scotland training courses: publishingscotland.org/training/training-courses

5| Quick tips for proofreading your own work

It's hard to see errors in something you've written yourself, because your brain automatically tells you what you *meant* to write, not always what's actually there. For that reason, **we always recommend hiring a professional proofreader** to check your text. However, you should still do a final check yourself before publishing, even if you've paid a professional to help you along the way. Here is a list of some final checks you can make yourself. You'll see there's a lot to do (and that's just part of what professional proofreaders do).

Task	Notes
Read every letter	*Proof*-reading is not the same as reading for pleasure, when we can skip bits and our brain steps in to make up the meaning. To proofread your work you need to read slowly and check every letter of every word.
Split up the tasks	You also need to check that the whole text makes sense, so it can be more effective to read once for errors, then read again for sense.
One step forward, two steps back …	If you find a mistake, correct it, but then go back a few words before starting again. It's easy to miss a second error that's close to one you've just fixed.
Use any software tools you have	If you've got your text in Word or another writing program, turn on the spelling checker and pay attention to those red squiggly lines. Be cautious, though! You still need human judgement to decide whether the machine is right or not. (And beware of AI grammar checkers, which invariably throw up lots of wrong or inelegant suggestions.)

Consistency is key	If you work with an editor they'll probably compile a style sheet of decisions on spellings, capitalisation, which words to hyphenate, and so on. Check your text against the list if you have it, or compile one yourself. Remember, many aspects of writing are not right or wrong in themselves, but simply a matter of choosing a preference.
Sequence dancing	Wherever you have a numbered list, or you mention a number of items, check the numbers. Do likewise for text in alphabetical order.
Perfect pairs	Wherever you find an opening bracket or quote mark, make sure there's a corresponding closing one (or the other way round).
False friends	Look out for words that sound the same but have different spellings (for example bare/bear; principal/ principle; accept/except), and for misspellings that are hard to spot because they look similar (from/ form; casual/causal; desert/dessert; public/pubic).
Listen up	It can be very helpful to turn on your computer's 'read aloud' facility and let it go through your text. You may notice different things in hearing it than reading it.
Look beyond the words	An important part of a final proofreading check is making sure the layout of your document or text is correct, as well as the words it contains. Are headings clear and the right size/font? Are the page numbers correct? Does everything line up as it should? Are images the right ones, and do they have the right captions/credits? Do links work if it's digital? And so on …

6| Proofreading vs copyediting checklist

Proofreading is …

✓	✗
working on edited text in final layout	working on raw or draft text
checking for essential errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation	changing your mind on spelling preferences
making minor changes for sense	rephrasing to flow or sound better
ensuring all page elements are consistent and correctly placed and style decisions are applied	reordering or changing structure or layout
checking that tables and illustrations are consecutively numbered and placed correctly	adding in new text or illustrations
checking that references and citations are correctly formatted	checking accuracy of references and citations
checking that an index is formatted consistently	checking index page numbers

Copyediting is ...

✔	✖
working on raw or draft text	working on text in final layout
checking for spelling, punctuation and grammar errors	substantial rewriting
making changes for flow, tone and intended readership	development of or planning the content
applying your house style or ensuring consistency in spellings, capital letters, date formats, numbers, units and more ...	preparing a comprehensive style guide for you or your organisation
marking up the structure for the designer (headings, boxed text, quotes, tables, etc)	designing the layout or doing the typesetting
listing items that need permission to use/reproduce	getting permissions (eg for quoted extracts)
formatting references and citations into chosen style	checking accuracy of references and citations
numbering tables, figures and illustrations; checking content against text and captions	producing artwork or graphics for you
querying obvious factual inaccuracies	doing substantial research or fact-checking
flagging potential legal issues	solving defamatory or other legal issues
marking up an index for consistent formatting	compiling an index or checking index page numbers

Chartered Institute of Editing and Proofreading

Most people don't really know what editors and proofreaders do. But working with a trained and experienced editorial professional makes sense to help achieve your publishing goals.

This short booklet aims to help you make sure that your written texts are as good as they can be and that they get your message across effectively, whether you're writing a business document, product packaging or a bestseller novel. There's a lot more to good editing and proofreading than you might think.

Inside you'll find:

- An explanation of the services provided by different sorts of editorial professionals and who to use for what job.
- A summary of the differences between copyediting and proofreading.
- Tips for proofreading your own writing.
- How to find a good editorial professional to work with you.

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