

LEVELS OF EDITING

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TURNING YOUR SHEET INTO SILK

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My Commitment to You

Whatever your sheet of preference – papyrus, paper, or tablet, I can help make your work the best it can be.

- I will edit and proofread ethically.
- I will not take on work that contradicts my principles.
- I will provide honest assessments of your work.
- I will put my award-winning knowledge and experience as a writer and editor to work for you.

Introduction

Depending on who you ask, or how you break it up, there are between 4 and 6 levels of editing. Editors can talk about the nuances for days. I know, I've attended the conferences. Luckily, all you need to know is that editing happens in three stages:

- The Panoramic Stage
- The Bushwhacking Stage
- The Mop-up Stage

Put differently, it's about moving from using a hatchet to using a scalpel and, ultimately, microscopic laser knives.

Each stage can be broken down into specific roles and tasks, and while some editors are generalists, others specialize.

Knowing what kind of editing you need or want helps you decide which editor hire.

So, let's take a closer look, shall we?

The Panoramic View

Developmental Editing

In the developmental editing phase, your editor takes a **Panoramic View** of your manuscript. Imagine standing on the peak of a mountain and looking out over the valley. The scenery is as beautiful as your manuscript. Your guide stands beside you and starts pointing out the little things: Notice that brown clump of trees? That's pine beetle infestation. Left unchecked, it could destroy the entire forest. See that rock formation? Beautiful, isn't it? Let's see if we can find more like that. See that wrapper? Let's pick it up and throw it away. Your editor guide points out the Good, the Bad, and the downright Ugly.

Depending on what you want and need, an editor can be a guide and mentor who will hold your hand through the entire hike (**Mentoring and Project Development**).

Or, your guide can point to the places you should visit or avoid and let you explore the canyons on your own (**Evaluations and Critiques**).

A final option is to let your editor be an accompanying guide who moves obstacles out of the way and fixes structural weaknesses, while also providing interesting observations and suggestions for for alternate routes to the end (**Structural Editing**).

The Panoramic View

Mentoring and Project Development

Mentoring and Project Development are good options for anyone who hasn't written a book before and needs help with anything (or everything) from planning a project to monitoring progress and holding the writer's hand through the entire process.

The Panoramic View

Evaluations and Critiques

Evaluations and Critiques are useful for when you've written a manuscript but now want someone to tell you what is working and what is not. Remember, when doing an evaluation, an editor will not fix any problems, but will merely point to strengths and weaknesses and offer suggestions on how to go about fixing things. A good evaluation will consider plot, time, place, spacing, character and characterization, point of view, and other structural elements. It will also offer some writing advice.

Of course, you could ask a friend or a member of your writing group to do this for you, but an editor will bring professional experience and will present you with a detailed report to guide you in your revisions.

Many Writers' Guilds and Unions offer evaluation services to their members for a fee.

Please also see **Sensitivity Reading** in the **Mop-up** section of this booklet.

The Panoramic View

Structural Editing

Structural Editing is fixing the bigger items that an editor might point out in an evaluation. Some editors may call this developmental editing, but I like to nitpick. For me, developmental editing is an overarching term that encompasses several separate processes; structural editing is one of these processes and involves clearing the underbrush to make a clear path for the reader to follow.

Good writing tells a story. It doesn't matter whether it is a romance novel; or a postmodern, genre-defying anti-narrative; or a collection of poetry; or non-fiction: there's a story that wants to be told. Structural editing is about finding the most appropriate way of telling it.

During a structural edit, an editor will move passages around and cut excess bits. The editor will point out where to linger and where to scoot right past. Where the point of view or tense shifts. Whether characters behave consistently. Whether the dialogue is appropriate. Etc.

In other words, **Structural Editing** is about ordering things and understanding how the elements fit.

Bushwhacking

Overview

Now that your editor has helped you see the big picture and together you've identified what needs to be done, it's time to truly get into the weeds for some serious bushwhacking.

There are two parts to the bushwhacking stage:

- Line Editing
- Copyediting

Many editors use the terms interchangeably, or don't distinguish between them. That is because those editors prefer to do both line editing and copyediting at the same time. There's nothing wrong with that.

I like to do the bushwhacking in two stages, as it offers an opportunity to step back and check my work.

Bushwhacking

Line Editing

Line Editing is about smoothing the sentences. Where a structural edit controls the pace of the story overall by helping you figure out where to pause and where to move along at chapter or scene level, or how to order the poems in a collection, line editing does this on a paragraph and sentence level.

Line editing is getting into the weeds and cleaning up. This is the stage where editors rely on precision instruments, like punctuation. Do you want a long, flowing sentence that is held together with commas and semi-colons and sub-clauses? Or do you need a short sentence? What punctuation will give your words just the right weight and flow? An editor can help.

Line editing is what keeps the reader on the page and makes the language sing.



Bushwhacking

Copyediting

Copyediting follows after line editing. A copyeditor checks the line edits to see if any punctuation was used incorrectly, or whether there were typos and spelling errors, and whether there is consistent presentation.

This is the stage where editors make the final decisions:

- Will it be British or American spelling?
- How do we represent numbers? Numerals or spelled out?
- To hyphenate, or not?

Making these decisions and ensuring consistency throughout ensures that reading a well-edited book is a pleasure. It is a late-stage activity that is best done when the larger manuscript issues have been settled.

Mop-up

Overview

Whether you've spent the day crafting with ice cream sticks on the kitchen table or building an oak cabinet in a workshop, the last thing you need to do before switching off the lights is clean up shop. There are four mop-up tasks in the editorial process:

- Proofreading
- Fact Checking
- Sensitivity Reading
- Preparing for Submission



Mop-up ***Proofreading***

Proofreading is quality control at the end of the publishing process. The final spit and polish before you put your book out into the world.

The proofreader checks for design problems and text-based errors that may have been introduced during the late stages of book production.

Let me repeat: Proofreading is quality control. It is not a last-minute cure for all writing evils. Proofreading is essential, but it is not a substitute for editing.

I deal with aspects of proofreading in more detail in these free booklets:

- *Proofreading*
- *Proofreading Tips*
- *Mark My Words: Editorial Symbols*

Mop-up

Fact Checking

Fact checking is the process of making sure that the facts you cite or rely on in your writing are correct. Whether you are writing non-fiction that relies on facts and data from many sources, or are writing fiction that is set in a specific historical period, ensuring the accuracy of your facts is essential – your readers are almost certainly guardians of arcane knowledge and will call out your errors.

I once read a story in which a character walks in the bush and smells gas leaking from the ground. Mayhem ensues as fear of an explosion grips everyone within miles of the scene. The problem? Natural gas is odourless and colourless – the smell we associate with gas is mercaptin that has been added afterwards as a safety measure. A seemingly benign error, but it derailed the entire premise of the book. Fact checkers are trained to see obvious and not-so-obvious factual errors.

Not every book needs a dedicated fact checker, but if you draw on facts and specialist knowledge, consider hiring a fact checker.

Mop-up

Sensitivity Reading

Sensitivity readings are more common now than they were a decade ago and they remain politically charged. A sensitivity reading is when you ask a specialist reader to critique your work to point out where your writing reveals (often unintended) biases, stereotypes, potential cultural appropriation, or problematic and offensive language.

Sensitivity readings are particularly important when you write about cultures or groups to which you do not belong, or if you deal with material that could trigger trauma responses in readers.

Arguments for sensitivity readings point out that we need to be more aware of cultural biases, diversity, stereotyping, problematic language, and trigger events.

Arguments against sensitivity readings focus on the danger of censorship, stifling creativity, and a lack of variety in opinions that can emerge.

I have included **Sensitivity Reading** in the Mop-up stage, not because I believe it is an afterthought, but because we are all human. Of course you should consider sensitivity from the very beginning, but even the most conscientious writers slip up. Like with proofreading and fact checking, having expert eyes look over your work at the very end is a good idea.

Mop-up

Preparing for Submission

So you thought that after all this editing and mopping up, that you were done? Sorry. You still have to find a place to publish your work.

Every publisher, journal, or magazine has its own preferences on how to submit (email, mail, online through a portal, and so on). You need to write a pitch letter and prepare a submission package – agents and publishers have very specific instructions on what they want, and how much they want.

Talk to your editor about your publishing plans. Many editors have close knowledge of the publishing industry and can offer advice and services to help you make your work pitch perfect.

If you plan to self-publish, you still need to design your book, print it (if you so wish), and market it. I deal with aspects on self-publishing in a separate booklet.

Additional Resources

Want to know more about editing or want tips on the craft of writing? Please take a look at my ever-growing set of free booklets.



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