

EDITING LEVELS

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6. Proofreading Checklist

Proofreading ensures your manuscript is fit for publication. It is the last step in the editing process. It is often referred to as galley proofing or page proofing as it is done after the designer has finished the interior design work and the cover design. A copy of the manuscript in its book form (or article or story or other form) is passed by the designer and/or typesetter to a proofreader who will go through it one last time to make sure it is as polished as possible. This is known as the quality control stage. If a publishing company (either a book publisher or a magazine or other publisher) is in charge of your manuscript at this point, they will provide the proofreader; but if you are self-publishing, you will need to at minimum self-proofread for short items and definitely hire an experienced proofreader for longer ones.

The proofreader will look for corrections to text errors that may have been introduced accidentally during editing, such as punctuation errors or typos, as well as minor problems remaining from previous rounds of editing. Proofreading also looks for design issues, including both cover design issues and interior design issues such as headings, paragraphing, orphans and widows, citation formatting, making sure page numbers on the Table of Contents and/or in the index match up to the actual page numbers, correct bibliographic information, and other layout problems. If the document is an e-file, it will also include ensuring that links are accurate and active. Note that if you are publishing your book as both an e-book and as a traditional paper style book, you will need to have both document formats proofread, as these files are not identical. This is not just a final skim of the document; it is a very careful “fresh eyes” search for any remaining issues.

Like any level of professional editing, it is your responsibility to book your proofreader well ahead of time to make sure this editor can fit you into their schedule. Also provide your proofreader with your style sheet and let the proofing editor know which style guide you’ve used. As with other levels of editing, make sure your choice of proofreader is experienced with your type of document (subject area, genre, academic, nonfiction, etc.).

A good proofreader is not just your high school English teacher or your mom—or even you, no matter how good you are at proofreading. Especially for book-length manuscripts, a professional proofreader needs to be familiar with industry standard conventions and ensure they are followed. And ideally, he or she will have “fresh eyes” to spot even the tiniest errors. While your copy editor may be able to proofread, he or she may be too close to the document to notice every

issue. If you really want your copy editor to proofread, allow at least a couple weeks or more between copy editing and proofreading in order to ensure objectivity.

Tips for self-proofreading and for beta-proofreaders

Whatever your situation, why not do as much proofreading as you can yourself—and also possibly ask a beta reader (or two or three who you know have sharp eyes) to do a proofread for you? Then, if you do need to hire a proofreader, the job won't take as long (or cost as much). Here are some tips to help you with your own proofreading:

- If you have access to both the original manuscript and the galley proof, it is wise to proofread them side by side to catch any errors which may have been introduced during typesetting.
- Use software tools for spelling and grammar checks before and after proofreading by sight. Before using a spell-check tool, check your personal style sheet and add character and place names to your word processor's dictionary, as well as specific spellings you prefer in the case of words with alternative spellings.
- If your manuscript isn't already typeset (as might be the case for a manuscript that will be published as an e-file), change the font, or print out the manuscript, or change it to a format like a PDF to fool your brain into seeing the text as if for the first time. You'll be surprised what small errors you might catch. Then convert the manuscript back to the format you need for publishing purposes and check once more.
- Other ways to trick your brain into seeing the script anew include reading from back to front (chapter by chapter), read slowly and aloud, consciously read one word or one sentence at a time or line by line, and get out your style sheet list of commonly made errors and watch out for them.
- If possible, don't proofread on your computer screen—unless your piece will be published to be read on computer. If your piece is likely to be read on-screen, think about what device is most likely to be used to read the finished product, and do your proofreading on that device. If it is likely to be read on different devices (computer, tablet, e-reader, smartphone), do at least some proofreading on each to see what differences might occur.
- If you will be self-publishing in e-book format, make sure you do a final proofread in the format you will be using to publish (for example, convert your file to a MOBI file and read it on your Kindle).
- Do your proofread in a different location from where you did the copy edit. Strange as it seems, a change of location can really make you “see” or “experience” the manuscript in a new way.
- Take a week or more after the copy edit before proofreading. Then try to put yourself into the head of your target readers. Try to experience the manuscript as they will see it. If possible, have a couple beta-readers proof it as well as yourself.

- Recheck all names, dates, numbers, and other similar details even if that was already done in the copy edit.
- Watch out for design consistency as well as textual accuracy.
- If you are doing a final check of your manuscript before submitting to a publisher, whether that be a book or magazine or website or other publisher, be sure that the particular publisher’s house style requirements have been met.
- Use the “find and replace” function in Word for common errors. Examples:
 - Habitually misspelled words: Find: “misspelled word”; Replace: “correct spelling”.
 - Overused words and phrases: Type the word/phrase into the “Find” function; then you’ll need to accept, replace, or delete manually as appropriate in each instance. Alternatively, you could upload your manuscript to wordle.com or tagged.com (or another “cloud” site) to find your very frequently used words. On Scrivener (word processing software) you can use Project > Text Statistics to check word frequency. (Ideally, you will have already done this step at the copyediting stage.)
 - Finding and removing extra spaces can be tricky. Here’s a trick for each:
 - To remove extra spaces mid-sentence: Find: type two spaces; Replace: type one space. Choose “replace all.”
 - To remove extra spaces after periods: Find: type: period space space; Replace: type: period space.
 - To remove an extra space at the beginning of a paragraph: Find: type: ^p space; Replace: type: ^p Then choose “replace all.”

You can learn more of these kinds of proofreading tricks if you download “The Author’s Proofreading Companion” (PDF) at www.louiseharnbyproofreader.com (includes information on use of Word’s Find and Replace; Word styles; Wildcards; Citation punctuation; confusables macro; hyphen/dash styles; ellipses styles; stylistic preferences; and a thorough list of UK and USA style guide specifics).

What does a professional proofreader look for?

The following is an outline of the items examined by a professional proofreader; the actual details are even more complicated. As you will see, unless you have a very simple document, you really do need a proofreader who knows industry standards (once you’ve done your best self-proofreading).

- Preliminaries: Copyright page (author name, date of publication, copyright statement, etc.); Table of Contents; List of tables, maps, or plates; contributors/acknowledgments page(s); pagination (Arabic for prelim pages, Roman for rest; check size and positioning); running heads in prelim section.
- Main text: Besides the main text itself, the proofreader will examine: Pagination done according to industry standards; running heads done according to industry standards; chapter titles, headings, and subheadings (including formatting and spacing); lists (spacing, bullet style, end of line punctuation); page depth; margins; correct citation style, notes and

cross-references; layout (spacing, indents, typeface and size; word breaks, widows—single word on the first line of a page—and orphans—single word on the last line of a page), punctuation (especially items like quotation marks, hyphens, dashes, and ellipses, which are done in a variety of ways depending on the context), double spaces after end punctuation, missing or incorrect punctuation, superscripts, correct dialogue punctuation and paragraphing, stacked breaks (more than 2 consecutive lines ending with hyphens), and more.

- Permissions and acknowledgments for extracts and quotes, as required.
- Figures, tables, maps, plates: quality, numbering, design, spelling, punctuation, grammar, column alignment, captions.

End matter: bibliography and notes done according to style manual requirements; make sure they accurately match citation materials in the main text; glossary order and layout; indexing done accurately.

If you decide to have your copy editor also do the proofreading

- Allow a good time break between editing and proofreading to make sure the editor can approach the proofing with fresh eyes.
- If the manuscript for proofreading is not already in typeset format, the editor may ask the writer to provide a copy of the manuscript in a different format (e.g. converted to PDF or printed out in paper form). This will fool the editor's brain into seeing the text as if for the first time.
- If the proofreading requires special items such as checking copyright page information, proper bibliographic citations, or indexing that the proof editor might already have done in previous editing levels, it should still be done again, as errors can occur in design and typesetting.
- Now, as a proofreader, the copy editor will have extra duties such as checking the covers, pagination, and other proofreading requirements related to design consistency as well as textual accuracy. Make sure your copy editor has these skills. Proofreading has its own set of requirements; it's not just a quick skim. The writer should allow time (and payment) for the proofreading to be done properly.
- There can be some advantages to having the same person as both copy editor and proofreader, assuming the above requirements are followed. For example:
 - The copyeditor will have already built a strong relationship with the writer, which can carry over into the proofreading phase.

With a knowledge of the text, and especially reasons why a certain style has been used, why a particular spelling has been chosen, why writing “rules” have been broken for a specific effect, and so on, the proofreader will not need to question these when they turn up during proofreading.

Putting these notes into practice:

When you have completed the Copyedit draft of your manuscript, again set it aside for a week or two or clear your mind. Review the Proofreading checklist above, and then read through the manuscript again, making notes and self-editing aspects you need to improve. Once that is done, you may wish to have a couple more beta-readers read the manuscript—be sure to provide them with the checklist above, so they'll know what kind of advice you are looking for at this stage.

Once you have self-edited and proofread your manuscript to the best of your ability—with the help of your self-editing team of alpha and beta readers, writing group members, Feedback group, and writing partner—and then had your manuscript interior design and cover design done (ideally by a professional book designer, unless you have those specialized skills)—it is time to hire a professional proofreader who can spot and correct as many remaining errors as possible.

What's next? Will you self-publish (under your own direction, or with the help of a self-publishing company) or will you seek a traditional publisher (and an agent if required)? Another important topic to dig into!

Don't forget to place this exercise in your binder or Duotang.