

# Traditional Publishing Terms: Editing and Production

**Manuscript** – the file you are working on. Complete manuscript – finished work of fiction that has not been through professional edits.

**ARC** – Advance Reader Copy. File the publishers send out for early reviews. Usually, post-copyedit but before the proofread. See below.

**Developmental/Content edit** – the edit that focuses on storytelling: plot, pacing, characterization, etc. The content edit takes the longest to get and the longest to get through. This is the time to make large changes if needed.

**Copyedit** – the edit that focuses on grammar, punctuation, fact checking, and narrative inconsistencies. Clunky sentences, unclear sentences, mutating names, eye color, people sitting down after they already sat down – all of that gets corrected here. Last chance to make significant alterations.

**Proofread** – final chance to fix minor mistakes. Do NOT make significant alterations at this stage. Every time you mess with your sentences, you are introducing errors that the copyeditor will not see. Also, the typography has been set at this stage, and the book has been prepped for printing. Minor fixes only, unless something really must be corrected.

The publishing house will often state that they will charge you money if you make too many edits at this stage. The wording can be found under the Editing Section of your contract and will read something like

*The cost of the Proprietor's alterations in the proofs in excess of ten percent (10%) of the initial setting cost will be charged against the Proprietor's royalty account, except that the Proprietor will not be charged for corrections arising from the typesetter's failure to accurately reproduce the copy-edited manuscript.*

I have never had it happen, but I saw it once. The author rewrote significant parts of the book and repunctuated almost every compound sentence. It is very rare, so don't stress out about this and fix what must be fixed, but keep your corrections small.

If you are rephrasing sentences at this stage, try to keep the number of characters the same, so you don't screw up the paragraph layout. If you add too much, the paragraph will run over and it's a bigger fix on their end.

Yes: "Her dress was white." (20 characters) -> "She wore white." (15 characters.)

No: "Her dress was white." (20 characters) - > "She wore a white gown that was the color of fresh snow that fell at the first hint of winter in the month of Freezeyourbuttoff." (128 characters.)

To quickly find out the number of characters, highlight the problem in Word and click on the word count in the bottom left corner. Include spaces in your count.

## People

*People you usually have contact with are marked with \**

**Content editor\*** – the person who does the content edit. When you are published by a traditional publishing house, your primary editor does your content edit. That editor is your main point of contact. They do not work for you. They work for the publishing house. You are not an employer and employee, but colleagues and peers. If you are coming from the selfpublished side, there may be a tone shift here.

Your content editor is your advocate, and they usually know what they are doing. They are invested in your book's success. They want the book to be a commercial and critical achievement. The function of the content editor is to shape the manuscript and identify problematic areas. They may suggest extensive changes, and they may propose solutions that will not work for you. If this happens, don't panic. Address the problems themselves, even if you fix them in a way that the editor didn't anticipate. As long as the problem goes away, most editors will be fine with it.

Occasionally, you will get an editor who will insist on their way or the highway. The buck stops with you. You can refuse to make edits but consider this route very carefully. Most of the time, if you don't make the changes they suggest, the book will likely still get published. Cases where the book was pulled because of editorial differences are very rare and are usually initiated by the writer, but the publishing house has the power to cancel the book.

Look at your contract under something like Deliverables or Delivery of the Manuscript. The wording will be something like:

(d) If the manuscript# or any portion thereof, when delivered, is not satisfactory to the Publisher in style, content, length, and form, the Publisher, ~~in its sole discretion, shall have the option either to~~ notify the Author in writing+ to what extent the manuscript (or relevant portion) is not satisfactory, in which event the Author shall have ~~thirty (30)~~ days following the receipt of such notice to submit a manuscript that is satisfactory as provided in subparagraph 3(a) above and as provided by such notice. ~~or to terminate this Agreement## upon written notice to the Author.~~ **PLEASE SEE RIDER TO SUBPARAGRAPH 3(d).**

(e) ~~If the Publisher shall exercise the first option in subparagraph 3(d) above with respect to any Book, and the Author fails or refuses to comply with the notice, the Publisher, in its sole discretion, shall have the option either to terminate this Agreement## upon written notice to the Author, or to have the necessary work done upon the manuscript, if need be employing outside editorial assistance, and to charge the cost thereof to the Author against the Work or past works of the Author++.~~

This is a very old contract boilerplate. Note that they reserved the right to edit your manuscript whether you like it or not. Your agent should get this clause crossed out.

What happens if you received an extremely light or no content edit: yes, this happens occasionally, especially if the editor has a large volume of manuscripts lined up. If the editor checked out, there is not much you can do. Trust that you wrote a good book and perhaps look for a new publishing partner for the next contract.

**Editorial Assistant\*** – this is the assistant of your editor. This person is very helpful. If you need admin things, like updated files or clarification of schedule, this is the person to ask.

**Managing editor\*** – this editor is incredibly important. This is the person who puts everything together: copyedit, proofread, etc. This is the deadline person, the on-top-of-everything person, and you may see their comments in the manuscript, which they will read several times, often saving your bacon when you mess up and nobody else catches it.

**Copyeditor** – the person who does the copyedit. Usually a contractor. Most of the time copyedits are outsourced. If you get a good one, always request them back. If you get a bad one, ask to switch.

More corrections is usually better than less, even if it makes you want to scream, because at least you know they scrubbed the manuscript. If you get a copyedit that is superlight, you are in trouble. You can hire your own CE to edit on top of the publisher's subpar copyedit. The publishing house will not care. If you scan the copyedit, and it is light, and you see a typo on page three they missed, you need to email the editor and ask if there is any additional time you can request to go through it. Usually, they can get you an extra week or two, although not always. Then you run to your favorite freelancer and chuck the manuscript at them.

People get very upset when this happens, because the publishing house takes a huge percentage of the profit and the expectation is that they will provide quality edits. Bottom line on this: you can waste a lot of energy being upset, or

you can hire a freelancer. Since your name is on the cover, everything is your fault, and the readers will not care that the publisher's CE fell down on the job. They will only care that the book has errors that detract from their experience.

**Proofreader** – usually a contractor. If you have your own private beta readers, now is the time to throw the manuscript at them and ask them if they snag on anything typo-wise. This is the final scrub before publication.

**Art director** – the person in charge of your cover. Check your contract. If it says cover approval, you can veto the cover. If it says cover consult, you can offer an opinion, but they will go on without you. Everybody else's opinion often overrides yours. The wording will be something like:

***The Publisher will consult with the Proprietor concerning the following, but the Publisher's decision with respect to such matters will be final:***

***upon the Proprietor's written request, the cover concept of the Publisher's initial edition of the Work;***

An email is a written request, and trad publishing houses will absolutely talk to you about the cover. Be prepared that everything you say will be ignored.

There is a very limited amount of influence you can exert here. Once they paid for the cover, they like to stick to it. Yes, you can occasionally get them to change it, but I've known people who flew to New York to make personal appeals and still failed. Take it from someone who has had more than one cover mocked by the readers: it is what it is. Fight the good fight but save your energy. If the

book has commercial appeal, word of the mouth will compensate for the damage of the ugly cover.

**Cover artist** – person who creates the cover image.

**Cover design** – person who creates overall look and adds typography to your cover.

**Editorial designer** – person who creates the layout and determines typography.

**Publicity\*** – the person who arranges publicity that does not require money. Interviews, ARCs, social, etc. Book tour – publicity. Maybe be named as publicist, director of publicity, etc.

**Marketing\*** – the person that is responsible for ads and other advertisement that requires money. Incentive boxes for preorders – marketing. Usually, marketing manager or director.

**NOTE:** marketing and publicity spheres overlap. Sometimes marketing will ask for an interview, and publicity will ask for commissioned art. When posting information on your website, such as “For review copies, contact NAME,” list the publicist, not the marketing manager.

Marketing and publicity is an iceberg. Authors do not see 80% of it. Sometimes that iceberg is tiny. I remember when “online promotion” meant your editor would mention the book title on their Twitter. Yes, you do still need promote on your own. Not, it’s not fair. The world is mean and publishing is meaner.

**What to do when there is a conflict:** go to your agent. They take their 15% percent. Let them earn it.

**Gratitude Etiquette:** get a lot of questions about this for some reason. It is always nice to acknowledge people who worked on the manuscript. Ask the publishing house, and they will give you a list. You are under no obligation to thank people if you don't like what they did for your book. This is fully your prerogative.

Business gifts are nice but are never expected. If you send nothing at all, nobody will notice or be upset. A handwritten card is always appreciated. If you are sending gifts for the holidays, try to find out what people like. Don't just send chocolate. Everyone sends chocolate. Sometimes people like cheese or will request a small donation in their name to their favorite charity. Please check to make sure that you are donating to the causes your recipient supports.