

The 5 kinds of editing: which ones do you need?

You need to get that proofread, someone tells you.
You look for a proofreader. You just want them to 'fix' your text.
The proofreader says 'You're not ready for a proofread yet.'
Where do you go from there?



1: Developmental editing

A 'dev edit' involves someone reading your book (or, indeed, article) and writing a report on what is needed to 'fix' it. The report may recommend moving chunks around, adding or removing artwork, or changing tables to text or text to tables.

2: Structural editing

In a structural edit, the editor will make dev edit-type changes for you. So it's pretty invasive but it gets the job done. There'll be plenty for you to do, afterwards.

3: Line editing

A line edit looks at flow, sentence structure, vocabulary, readability, spelling, grammar and punctuation, and whether the content is working.

4: Copyediting

The copyeditor gets the text ready for typesetting (aka layout): does the book work as a book? Does the table of contents match the chapters? Does the list of illustrations match the artwork? Does the text conform to the house style? Are all the references present and correct, and correctly styled? Ditto end notes, glossaries, appendixes, lists of contributors and any other elements. Is the spelling, grammar and punctuation right? Is there anything weird going on in Word styles? Everything is put right, queries are raised for the author and often the copyeditor is the one who makes the changes the author supplies. Then the copyeditor hands the ms over for typesetting.

In the UK, the distinction between line editing and copyediting isn't made nearly so much as in the USA, for instance.

The copyeditor does both jobs.

You may find people offering both, as two levels of intervention.

Check carefully what you're buying.



5: Proofreading

This is what you were told to ask for, right, and got knocked back? Here's why:

A proofreader takes the proofs, the typesetter's first attempt to make up the book, and reads them against the finished manuscript from the copyedit. They make sure that no bloopers have arrived – images flipped over, running heads awry, page numbers skipping around – and they are a hugely valuable final pair of eyes to make sure some typos didn't get past everyone else. The proofreader also checks that there are no bad line breaks, no rivers or similar layout problems, and that the text sits nicely on the page. The proofread is the last chance saloon to get things right.

Proofs can go through several versions if things are messy, but that's expensive and fraught with the risk of new errors being created. The proofreader will also collate all the various changes and check that they were made correctly.