

Types of Editing

For a craft where the precision of language is critical, the term *editing* is surprisingly imprecise. In general, an editor refines and corrects an author's manuscript, but people use a variety of words to describe different levels of editing and sometimes use the same words to mean different things—or different words to mean the same thing.

Think about editing as a process that moves along a spectrum from big to small, macro to, changes in roughly the following order...

- **Developmental editing** – The editor works with you up front to structure your book, including things like getting the right focus for the audience, organizing the topics, etc. If not brought in up front, a developmental editor could be engaged to radically restructure a first draft if needed.
- **Substantive editing** – The editor makes significant changes to the writing including things like moving entire chapters or paragraphs to improve the structure or flow, revising the language to be clearer, making suggestions for improvements, identifying plot holes, etc.

NOTE: The terms developmental editing and substantive editing are often used interchangeably and may sometimes be called **content editing**, **macro editing**, or **comprehensive editing**.

- **Line editing** – The editor improves the writing by checking for mechanics like grammar, spelling, punctuation, and usage, but also looks for clarity, style, consistency, flow, and so on. The editor may not make major changes like a substantive editor would, but may flag issues for the author to address.
- **Copy editing** – The editor focuses on mechanics like grammar, spelling, punctuation and usage. The editor typically doesn't make substantive changes but does correct many of the same types of items a proofreader would be looking for.

NOTE: Some people use the terms line editing and copy editing interchangeably.

- **Proofreading** – Proofreaders are typically looking only for mechanical errors such as misspellings or incorrect punctuation. Sometimes the editor may do a “light” copy edit as well as proofread, depending on the quality of the manuscript.

In a nutshell, when hiring an editor, describe what you are looking for and ask the editor for advice on what they think your manuscript needs. Focus more on *what you need* than on *what you call it*.