Hiring an Editor: A Guide for New Authors

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Introduction

Congratulations! You're probably researching editorial help because you've completed, or are seeking help to shape and complete, a manuscript. Writing a book is a huge undertaking and accomplishment! As you seek professional help in taking your manuscript to the next level, figuring out the ins and outs of how to find and hire an editor can be overwhelming. We've created this guide to help you navigate hiring a professional freelance editor: from what kind of editorial services you may need, to industry-standard rates, to the mechanics of seeking help through the EFA. As the nation's largest and oldest professional association for freelance editors and related professionals, the EFA is a valuable resource for authors looking to connect with editors and understand the editorial process. Before we dive into the information to follow, there are a few general guidelines:

1. The more information you can provide when reaching out to potential editors, the better. Some key information that is always good to have: page or word count, type of editorial service sought (more details on that below), deadline, rate being offered or project budget, and a short description of the work (particularly genre and subject matter).
2. Rates may vary considerably depending on the nature of the work, the time frame of the assignment, the degree of special expertise required, and other factors.
3. The EFA is a professional association of freelancers, meaning that each editor is independent, with their own skills and rates. As an organization, we do not assign work, make referrals, or set rates.
4. Editing an entire manuscript is a task that requires time. Many first-time authors may spend years shaping their books and then expect a quick turnaround on editing. While some editors may be happy to meet a rapid deadline, rush work commands higher rates.

Of course, if you have questions after reviewing this guide, feel free to reach out to us in the EFA office.

What Type of Editing Do I Need?

Understanding different roles in the editorial process is a key step to finding an editor who suits your needs and goals. The following terms describe distinct types of services that editors may provide and are useful when discussing your project with a freelancer. Please note that each of these skills is typically undertaken as a separate editorial phase, and that while one editor may be able to perform more than one of them, they would typically be done in stages.

EDITORIAL STAGES

Not every book needs every stage, but each one represents a fresh phase of editing. These services are rarely done simultaneously.

Manuscript Evaluation

This optional step is sometimes undertaken by authors as the first time a professional has seen their work. An editor will read the manuscript and offer high-level suggestions or opinions about the manuscript's possibilities.

Developmental Edit

This editorial step is done at a very early stage. It may stem from a simple idea that the editor helps shape, or the editor may take a very rough manuscript and suggest big changes in the structure or narrative.

Line/Content Edit

After the manuscript's core writing is done, a line or content editor may rewrite or reorganize sentences or passages to make the text smoother, more grammatical, and more consistent.

Copyedit

Once the text is finalized, copyeditors work on perfecting the language. In many ways copyediting is what people conceive of when they think of editing: correcting spelling, grammar, usage, and punctuation; checking cross-references; and preparing style sheets that guide consistency and accuracy across the manuscript.

Layout/Book Design

A book designer takes the completed manuscript and prepares it for publication by creating a design, laying out the pages, formatting the text, adding the illustrations, and creating the final product.

Proofread

This is the last pass for any errors before a book is published. Proofreaders check the text for errors, including typographical errors and problems with formatting. They compare the latest stage of the project to earlier stages and make sure changes have been made correctly.

Publication

Whether self-published or through a traditional publisher, digital only or printed, the book is out in the world and ready to be enjoyed!

Developmental editors develop a book or other project from the initial concept or early draft onward, often working closely with the author to study competing works and create a manuscript that stands out.

The terms **substantive editor**, **content editor**, and **line editor** are often used interchangeably for editors who make significant changes to a manuscript, such as rewriting and reorganizing the text.

The role of the **copyeditor** is as broad as it is important. Copyeditors correct spelling, grammar, usage, and punctuation; check cross-references; and prepare style sheets that guide consistency and accuracy across the manuscript. They also may insert coding for typesetting and ebooks.

What Is Proofreading?

Proofreaders perform a final check for any remaining errors, including typographical errors (spelling mistakes, missing or incorrect punctuation, and style inconsistencies). They also check for problems with typesetting elements, such as style for chapter titles and running heads; page makeup; and ebook page flow.

Copyediting and proofreading are often used interchangeably in common speech, but they are distinct services. In fact, proofreading is not considered editing. If you're looking for someone to review and correct grammar and punctuation, you're seeking a copyeditor. Proofreading is a late stage of preparing for publication and comes after your manuscript has been fully edited.

How Much Does Editing Cost?

Common editorial rates—regardless of whether a fee is flat rate, per page, per word, or hourly—tend to fall within the ranges indicated in the chart below, which is based on rates reported to the EFA by our members. These should be used only as a rough guideline; rates vary considerably depending on the nature of the work, the time frame of the assignment, the degree of special expertise required, and other factors. The industry standard for a manuscript page, however, is a firm 250 words. This chart represents only the most common editorial services. For a more complete list of common rates and services, please see [this page](#) on our website.

EDITING		
Basic copyediting	5-10 ms pgs/hr	$30-40/hr
Heavy copyediting	2-5 ms pgs/hr	$40-50/hr
Developmental editing	1-5 ms pgs/hr	$45-55/hr
Substantive or line editing	1-6 ms pgs/hr	$40-60/hr
Manuscript evaluation		$45-55/hr
Proofreading	9-13 ms pgs/hr	$30-35/hr

NOTE: ms = manuscript, pg = page, hr = hour

Though many freelancers prefer an hourly rate, per-word or per-project rates are often used as well.

To calculate a per-project rate, start by identifying the number of manuscript pages that are in your project (note that this may be different than the number of pages in your word processor). Take the word count of your document and divide it by 250 (the industry standard for a manuscript page). This will give you the number of manuscript pages in your project.

Next, take the editorial service you're interested in and calculate a per-page rate based on the chart. For example, if you're seeking a basic copyeditor, an industry-standard rate would be $30-40 an hour. Each hour, the editor is estimated to complete around 5-10 pages of editing. So, at the lowest and fastest end of this range we could assume 10 pages an hour at $30 an hour, which comes out to $3 a page. At the highest and slowest end of this range we would assume 5 pages of editing an hour at $40 an hour, which comes out to $8 a page. Multiply this per-page number by the number of manuscript pages you have calculated to get an approximate per-project rate.

How Do I Choose an Editor?

Picking an editor is a bit like dating: you're looking to click with someone. A good rapport between editor and author is key. Do your due diligence before hiring, just as you would with

any contractor. Get information on what other work they've done on similar books or projects and ask for references from previous clients.

In some cases, a brief sample edit or editing test from a freelancer you're interested in working with can help with your decision process. In other cases, contacting the editor's references is a better way to get a sense of what that editor can do and how they work. Developmental editing, in particular, is too large in scope to be captured by a short sample edit. Services such as copyediting or line editing may be reasonably evaluated with a sample edit.

The EFA Board of Governors offers the following list of best practices for tests (also called "sample edits"):

- Tests may be paid or unpaid.
- They should be a representative sample of your usual material.
- Unpaid tests:
  - Should not require any more than the equivalent of five standard (250-word, double-spaced) pages.
  - Should require about an hour of the candidate's time. A reasonable period should be allowed for turnaround.
  - Should not be any part of an unpublished or "live" work; i.e., **do not send a portion of the full manuscript you're seeking an editor for, in its unedited state, unless you're paying for the test**. The best unpaid sample edits are derived from early drafts of published (prior to completed editing) or inactive work.

- Paid tests:
  - **May be from the full manuscript in question**. The client should inform the candidate when live work is given as a test.
  - Should include instructions regarding the preferred style guide and any relevant house style guidelines, if applicable.
  - Should also include instructions regarding the preferred method for testing, such as hard copy; onscreen, in Microsoft Word and using Track Changes; or onscreen, marking up a PDF.

How Do I Find an Editor through the EFA?

The EFA is a professional association, not an agency. We do not assign work or make referrals. We do, however, provide two methods of connecting authors and other clients with editorial professionals. Both methods are handled through our website, and both are free.

EFA Job List

The EFA Job List connects clients with EFA members quickly. Submit your job listing using the form on our website under the "Hire a Freelancer" heading at the-efa.org. Filling out the form takes about three minutes. We review your listing, reach out to you with any questions, and post it if approved—often the same or next business day. Your job is then sent by email to all our members. Those interested in the project contact you directly to apply for the job. Most clients report receiving a robust response within hours of their posting going up.

Please note that we list only jobs that meet our suggested rate guidelines. We do not list jobs that pay below industry rates, are on spec, or are for a share of the royalties or profit. We do not list jobs that require bidding.

The Job List is a great option if you want freelancers to apply to you directly and you have a firm concept of the scope of the project and the pay rate you're offering.

Job Submission Form

Title *

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR APPLICANTS

Name

Company

Website
Include http://www.

http://

Email *

example@domain.com

JOB INFORMATION

Work Type *
Briefly describe the type of work
involved. May be the same as job Title.
Examples: Copyeditor, Chemistry editor

EFA Member Directory

The EFA Member Directory lets you search for freelancers based on their skills and specialties and reach out to them individually. It's a great option for clients who need a professional with specialized skills or in a particular geographic location, or who wish to approach freelancers individually. It's also useful for authors who need help refining what editorial services they need, or who would like to get price quotes from editors or ask for bids on a project.

The Member Directory allows you to search by name, location, skill, subject, specialty, and more. After you submit your search criteria, member names and brief information will appear in the search results. Click on the names to read full profiles. To search the directory, click here or go to our website, the-efa.org, hover over "Hire a Freelancer," and click on "Search the Member Directory."

Where Else Can I Find Information on the Publishing Process?

Many of our members have worked in the publishing industry and can be hired to help authors navigate querying agents, format their manuscripts for self-publishing, and more. However, these services should not be assumed to be included in an editorial project unless it is discussed with the freelancer in advance. It is important to keep in mind that these are often thought of as distinct services that not all editors offer. As with all things, communication is key!

Whether the publishing process is undertaken with the help of a freelancer or independently, authors may wish to consult the resources below for helpful information on the art of writing and the business of publishing.

Writing Groups

Many new authors benefit from joining a local writers' group. These groups can provide vital feedback and critiques on your writing, typically in exchange for the same with their members' work. Writing groups are useful for shaping your manuscript before seeking an editor to take it to the next level.
- For an in-person group, research local writing groups by searching online, consulting this list on writersrelief.com, searching meetup.com, or asking writer friends in your area. Local libraries, bookstores, and community centers may also have information on area groups.
- Many writers join online groups. Thewritelife.com gives a useful round-up of established ones here. You may also wish to search social media sites to find writing groups in your genre or subject area.

Finding an Agent

Reputable agents do not charge reading fees, submission fees, evaluation fees, or any other up-front fee. Editors can help prepare book proposals, query letters, and other submission materials, but they are not agents! Below are some good starting points for finding an agent. Note that your local library may have copies of some of the below titles.

Books

Jeff Herman's Guide to Book Publishers, Editors & Literary Agents: Who They Are, What They Want, How to Win Them Over (updated annually; use only the most recent edition)

Thinking Like Your Editor: How to Write Great Serious Nonfiction and Get It Published by Susan Rabiner and Alfred Fortunato

Annual guides from *Writer's Digest*—use only the most recent edition:
Guide to Literary Agents: The Most Trusted Guide to Getting Published
Children's Writer's & Illustrator's Market: The Most Trusted Guide to Getting Published
Writer's Market: The Most Trusted Guide to Getting Published

Literary Market Place: The Directory of the American Book Publishing Industry with Industry Indexes
(updated annually; use only the most recent edition)

Websites

Agent Query
agentquery.com

Jane Friedman
janefriedman.com

Manuscript Wish List
manuscriptwishlist.com

Query Tracker
querytracker.net

Other Organizations and Resources

- The Authors Guild
- Association of Authors' Representatives
- Horror Writers Association
- Independent Book Publishers Association (IBPA)
- Mystery Writers of America
- National Association of Memoir Writers (NAMW)
- Poets and Writers
- Publishers Marketplace
- The Purple Crayon
- Romance Writers of America
- Science Fiction & Fantasy Writers of America
- Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI)
- Writer Beware
- Writer's Digest

About the EFA

The EFA is a national nonprofit professional organization for self-employed workers in the publishing and communications industries. Founded in 1970, the EFA has over 2,600 members nationwide who bring a diversity of backgrounds, skills, and interests to the organization.

How to Contact the EFA

info@the-efa.org   866-929-5425   the-efa.org

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