

Self-Publishing 101

Part 2: Editing: Create your best book

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A four-part series

- Part 1: Overview of the process and a discussion of goals.
- Part 2: Editing: Creating your best book.
- Part 3: Formatting and distribution.
- Part 4: Marketing: Finding your audience.

Plotter or pantser?

- **Plotters** plan their book before they start writing, developing their cast of characters and figuring out what happens to them, step by step.
 - The plan might look like an outline, a list of scenes, or a detailed treatment.
 - Some plotters produce 80-page treatments/outlines before writing the first scene.
- **Pantsers** get an idea and start writing by the seat of their pants, discovering their story as they go.
 - Most pantsers have a lot of notes about their setting & characters.
 - They also may have a lot of the book in their head.

Discover your own style

- Do what works for you. Experiment, take classes, try things, be willing to learn and change. There's no one right way! Find your own method.
- Many writers are hybrids: plot the big pieces and pants from one to another.
- Nowadays, I plot the first half in detail with notes about the second half. Then when I reach the midpoint, I plot the rest of the book.
- <https://tinadubinsky.com/plotting-pantsing/>

What is editing?

- “Editing” can refer to everything from a massive restructuring to picking out typos in a polished manuscript.
- This lack of clarity can make authors think they’ve gotten the critical review they need when they haven’t.
- It’s important to get the right kind of editing to make your work shine.
- A great cover may tempt the reader to buy, but good editing keeps them reading to the end and makes them want the next book.

Types of editing

- Developmental
- Content
- Line-editing
- Copy-editing
- Proofreading

Developmental editing

- Reserve this term for pre-first draft planning. Plotting is an aspect of developmental editing; so is world-building. So is series design.
- More common to hire a dev editor for non-fiction than fiction.
- Dev editor helps the author plan a project: discuss themes, develop characters, explore settings, outline the plot.
- **Output:** a cast of characters, a story world, and a plot outline or a rich treatment (like a prose outline or a very long synopsis.)

Content editing

- An analysis of a complete draft of the book (usually first or second):
 - Characters: Are they real people, not stock? Do they behave consistently? Do the protagonists experience growth -- do they have character arcs?
 - Plot: Does it make sense in terms of the story world & the characters? Are there holes? Is there repetition? Are there long passages where nothing much happens? Does the story take too long to get rolling? Is the ending satisfactory?
 - Pace/Description/Setting: These things work together. Too slow? Info dumps, lengthy descriptions. Too fast? White room syndrome, generic setting.
- **Output:** a marked-up manuscript and a set of revision notes.

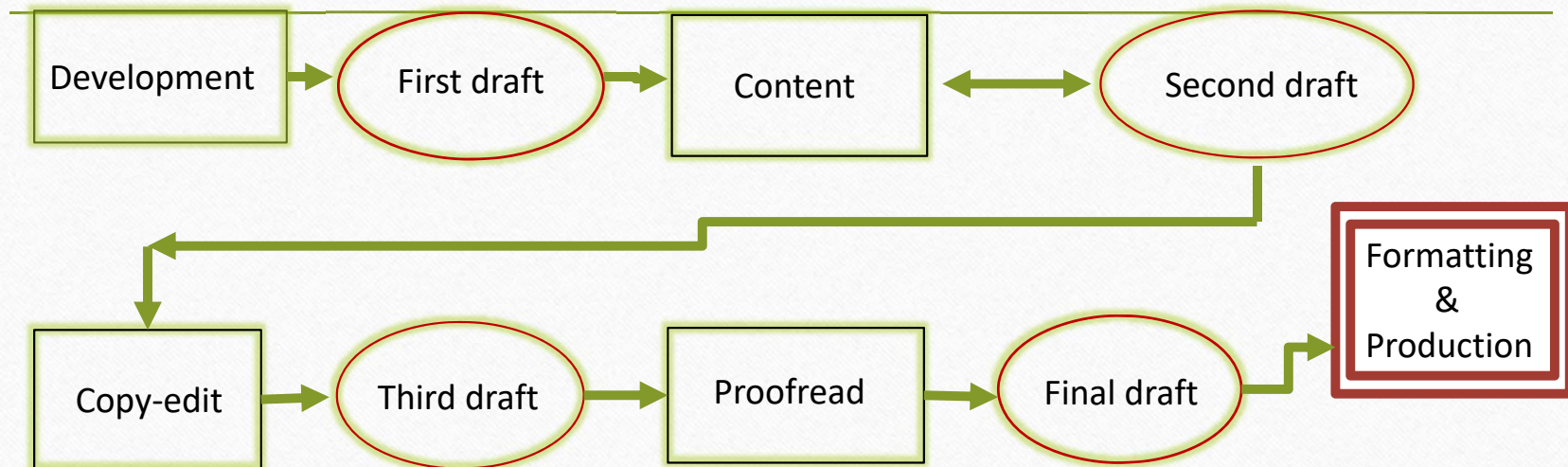
Copy-editing & line-editing

- Line-editing looks at language use like word choices and phrasing. It's all about style. They spot redundancies, unclear prose, repetitive usages.
- Copy-editing looks at textual correctness: grammar, punctuation, fact-checking, internal consistency (character's name changes mid-book.)
- Your American copy-editor should apply the Chicago Manual of Style.
- Some editors conflate these and do both in one pass.
- **Output:** a marked-up manuscript. Author applies (or ignores) the edits to produce the penultimate draft.
- **NB:** Don't bother to copy-edit a book that hasn't been fully revised for content!!

Proofreading

- Proofreaders just look for typos or stray whitespace.
- In olden days, this happened after the proof copy was printed.
- Nowadays, your editor will likely combine copy-editing and proofing.
- **Output:** a pristine manuscript ready to be formatted.
- NB: Do not touch one single word of this manuscript ever again!!!

Stages of a manuscript



All authors need editors

- Two major categories of editorial assistance:
 - Help getting the story right: content editing.
 - Help getting the manuscript ready for publication: copy-editing & proofreading.
- All authors need both to some degree.
- We need more content editing in the earlier stages of our career, but even experienced authors can get lazy, distracted, or bored.
- We all need quality feedback on our stories.

How to get quality feedback

- Getting the feedback you need when you need it is the hardest part of self-publishing.
- Critique groups and partners.
- Beta readers.
- Professional editors.

Self-editing

- This is a skill you ***must*** learn. You will self-edit every book you write, whether you hire professional editors or not.
- There's a multitude of great resources. Look for general books & classes and also genre-specific ones. They will understand your audience.
- Books: Some of my faves listed in the books&links handout.
- Classes: Lots online, many probably bad. Ask for recommendations from your writers' groups. Try these: <https://blog.reedsy.com/learning/>

Critique groups & partners

- A critique group is a small (usu. 4-8) group of writers at about the same level in terms of skill, publication path, and probably genre.
- Establish ground rules.
 - Who submits how many pages how often? We did <30pp every 2 weeks; rarely did more than 3 people have pages. We met for 2 hours to discuss big-picture issues. It worked!
 - Will there be drinking? Eating? Allow a little time for chatting.
 - Be very strict about etiquette. Find guidelines (SFWA has some) and enforce them.
- Pros: detailed feedback on a regular basis keeps you going & growing.
- Cons: it can take 6 months or more to get through your book.

Beta readers

- These are non-professionals who read your book like a sample member of your target audience. Make sure they like your genre!
- Trade, barter, or pay. I use a service and pay \$95. People find beta readers at Goodreads or in their writers' associations.
- Ask for the feedback you want. I want high-level stuff: characters, plot, pace. Do they work? Are there holes? When did you know whodunnit?
- Some betas use questionnaires or checklists. You could create one yourself.
- Even if you want proofreading, proofread that manuscript yourself first!

Professional editors

- Don't wait until the last minute! Take your time, shop around.
- Ask your writer pals for recommendations. Writing orgs may have lists of recommended editors.
- Ask in Editorial Freelancers Association, local freelancers organizations.
- Discuss your project with prospective editors, do sample rounds.
- You need someone who understands your genre and will work to make ***your best book***, not the book they would write if it was their idea.

What does it cost? Content editing

- Editors have sliding scales: less for easy jobs, more for hard ones. Rates vary widely. Shop around, talk to friends, interview editors!
- EFA: 1-5 pgs/hr @ \$45-55 hr = \$3,000 for a 300-page book at \$50/hour.
- You can find a deep edit for \$1500-ish or a lighter edit for \$300.
- \$1500 is a lot of money, but for that you should get focused coaching, chapter by chapter, with notes. With the right editor, it could transform your writing. It's cheaper than an MFA.

What does it cost? Copy-editing & proofing

- More sliding scales. Sloppy writers can expect to pay more. Proof it yourself first to save money.
- EFA: 5-10 pp/hr @ 30-40/hr = \$1050 for that 300-page novel.
- Ebook formatting fairies: \$0.008/wd = \$600 for 300 pp = 75,000 words
- The key thing is ***a copy-editor who respects your voice!*** You don't want an editor who corrects all the dialect in your dialog.
- DIY: If you are OCD enough, try reading the book aloud, slowly. Or use [ReadPlease](#) to auto-read it while you follow along in print. Amazing results!

Working with editors

- Plan ahead. Good editors are booked 1-2 months out. ***Respect their schedule!***
- They need to know how many words/pages so they can estimate time and cost. If you don't know, you're not ready.
- Remember that the editor is your ally. Take critiques as useful feedback, not personal attacks. You want that criticism; it's what you've hired them for.
- Don't react immediately. Take time to absorb the feedback. Consider their recommendations seriously. THEN discuss whatever isn't clear.
- Ultimately, the decisions are yours, whether it's characters or commas.

Resources

- Editorial Freelancers Association: www.the-efa.org
- Finding an editor. janefriedman.com/how-to-find-an-editor
- Beta readers: <https://www.goodreads.com/group/show/50920-beta-reader-group>
- Critique group etiquette: <http://www.diabolicalplots.com/the-skill-of-critiquing/>