

Proofreading or copyediting?

What kind of editorial work do you need? A text (printed matter or online content) may go through several rounds of preparation before it's presented to the world. If that work's done well, all the steps that go into making a text fit for publication become 'hidden' and readers just see the end result. So, you may not be sure what type of editorial work to ask for. You just want your text 'sorted', right?

This fact sheet is a quick checklist of the core differences between traditional proofreading (what most clients ask for) and copyediting.

Does it actually matter what you call it? Perhaps not, and in the real world editorial work rarely falls neatly into one category or the other. But proofreaders and copyeditors usually undergo different training, have different skills and work on different stages of the text's journey. Copyediting usually takes longer than proofreading and costs more. It therefore pays to find the right person for the tasks you need doing.

You can use this checklist as a starting point for negotiating a good brief for the job.

Copyediting and proofreading are both editing, which is wrestling with words; but proofreading is like wrestling in a broom cupboard.

Gerard M-F Hill

Proofreading is ...

| ✓ | ✗ |
|--|---|
| working on edited text in final layout | working on raw or draft text |
| checking for essential errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation | changing your mind on spelling preferences |
| making minor changes for sense | rephrasing to flow or sound better |
| ensuring all page elements are consistent and correctly placed and style decisions are applied | reordering or changing structure or layout |
| checking that tables and illustrations are consecutively numbered and placed correctly | adding in new text or illustrations |
| checking that references and citations are correctly formatted | checking accuracy of references and citations |
| checking that an index is formatted consistently | checking index page numbers |

Copyediting is ...

| ✓ | ✗ |
|---|--|
| working on raw or draft text | working on text in final layout |
| checking for spelling, punctuation and grammar errors | substantial rewriting |
| making changes for flow, tone and intended readership | development of or planning the content |
| applying your house style or ensuring consistency in eg spellings, capital letters, date format, numbers, units | preparing a comprehensive style guide for you or your organisation |
| marking up the structure for the designer (headings, boxed text, quotes, tables, etc) | designing the layout or doing the typesetting |
| listing items that need permission to use | getting permissions (eg for quoted extracts) |
| formatting references and citations into chosen style | checking accuracy of references and citations |
| numbering tables, figures and illustrations; checking content against text and captions | producing artwork or graphics for you |
| querying obvious factual inaccuracies | doing substantial research or fact-checking |
| flagging potential legal issues | solving defamatory or other legal issues |
| marking up an index for consistent formatting | compiling an index or checking index page numbers |

Further information

Our website contains helpful information about editing and proofreading. Have a look at our FAQs:

- What is **proofreading**?
- What is **copyediting**?

Need an editor or proofreader?

If you are looking for editorial help, you can search for free in our Directory of Editorial Services.

ciep.uk/directory

Written by Margaret Hunter, information director

The Chartered Institute of Editing and Proofreading (CIEP) is a non-profit body promoting excellence in English-language editing. We set and demonstrate editorial standards, and we are a community, training hub and support network for editorial professionals – the people who work to make text accurate, clear and fit for purpose.



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