

Editing vs Proofreading

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Editing versus Proofreading

**The greatest debate in the world
(for writers, anyway!)**

Many first-time clients of a professional editing company or freelance editor are unsure about the difference between editing and proofreading, and which service they need. Editing and proofreading produce different outcomes for writers, and therefore potential consumers must be aware of what they do.

This guide outlines the difference between editing and proofreading, not only to help our clients, but for writers in general who are evaluating their options. Based on our experience as a professional editing and proofreading company, we also provide general recommendations as to what service a typical client should receive.

The target audience is academic, book and business authors who are new to the publication process, such as students with a thesis or dissertation, first time book authors or businesses newly outsourcing their editing or proofreading. We avoid editor jargon and focus on helping writers make an informed choice between an editing or proofreading service.

Editing explained

Editing involves a proactive editor making changes and suggestions that will improve the overall quality of your writing, particularly in relation to language use and expression. After editing, your language will be sharp and consistent, your expression clear and the overall readability of your writing enhanced. Editing should ensure that your writing gives the impression that the English language comes naturally to you, even if it does not.

The following are some key questions that an editor will consider when editing a piece of writing:

- Have proper words been chosen to express your ideas? If it sounds like you have consulted a thesaurus throughout the document, an editor will pick up on it.
- Have you used a passive voice? An active voice is not always appropriate, but writing that is too passive does not make for compelling reading.
- Is the tone appropriate for the audience?
- Do you use too many words? Using unnecessary and frivolous words is a common trait in many writers, and is a pet hate for editors.
- Have you used gendered language appropriately?

Proofreading explained

[Proofreading](#), on the other hand, has less ambition than editing and is therefore a cheaper service, but it still performs a vital role. Proofreading is the process of correcting surface errors in writing, such as grammatical, spelling, punctuation and other language mistakes.

These are the key questions a proofreader will consider when proofreading a piece of writing:

- Are there any spelling errors?
- Are full stops, commas, colons, semicolons, etc., used correctly?
- Have words that sound like one another but have different meanings, such as there, their and they're, been used correctly?
- Have quotation marks and apostrophes been used appropriately?
- Are there any double spaces, particularly after full stops?

You might think that eliminating mistakes and inconsistencies in a document is not a particularly demanding job, and that a friend or family member, or even a computer program, could do it. However, a professional editor is a far more accomplished proofreader than your typical friend or family member and any computer program that Google has dreamed about.

A professional editor understands the conventions of English writing and the nuances of the language, is trained to be methodical, and through experience can identify and eliminate the common errors that often plague, for example, a novel or thesis. As well as catching easy to overlook mistakes, they can also identify inconsistent terminology, spelling and formatting.

Proofreading is an important service because any writing intended for publication—whether an academic article,

Editing

- ✓ Overall quality of writing improved
- ✓ Language-use enhanced
- ✓ Expression clearer
- ✓ Errors and inconsistencies removed
- ✓ Your writing will have maximum impact

Proofreading

- ✓ Spelling, grammar and typing mistakes eliminated
- ✓ Consistent language and formatting
- ✓ Perfects already good writing
- ✓ Ensures a publication-ready document
- ✓ Cheaper than editing

book or business document—must communicate its message in the clearest possible way. For writing to be clear, there must be no spelling, grammar or punctuation errors, or inconsistency in language, as these can undermine the impact of the writing and the credibility of the author.

Editing vs proofreading in a nutshell

“Editing can genuinely improve the quality of your writing, whereas proofreading perfects already good writing, and ensures that it is error-free.”



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Which should you choose: editing or proofreading?

Editing and proofreading are different jobs, and are designed for different stages of the revision process. Editing provides an opportunity to make your writing better, whilst proofreading is a final check to ensure perfection before publication.

Ideally a writer would receive an editing service first, and subsequently a final proofread just before publication. While we recommended this approach to book authors who covet publishing success, the reality is that many writers—academic, book or business—cannot afford both services. If you are only after one service, you need to choose the correct one, and this guide is designed to help.

If you are deciding between an editing or proofreading service, you need to ask yourself this question:

| *Are you satisfied with the quality of your writing?*

If yes, a proofreading service will generally be your best option, however, if there is scope to improve your writing, including language use, expression and adherence to any formal writing conventions specific to your field, editing is the right service for you.

What a typical writer should choose

In our experience, there are particular types of writers that should usually choose editing, whilst for others proofreading is more appropriate. The following examples are not hard-and-fast rules, but a general insight into the typical needs of certain writers. As a professional editing company, we know all too well that there are exceptions to the rule, and that writing between authors of similar backgrounds can vary greatly.

Editing is essential

- An **English as a Second Language (ESL) author** will almost invariably require editing rather than proofreading, whether they have written something [academic](#) (such as a [thesis](#) or [essay](#)), book or business related. ESL writers generally have trouble with the complexity of the English language and its sometimes curious norms. Even an ESL author that is highly proficient at speaking English can get tripped up by the nuances and contradictions of formal English writing (as many native-speakers can too!).
- At first instance, a **book author** should seek editing rather than proofreading. [Book editing](#) can be invaluable in enhancing the overall quality of the book's language, and can ensure that it reaches a publishable standard. The self-publishing and e-book markets, let alone the traditional publishing one, are so competitive

that you can be sure that the writers you are competing against have received a professional book editing service, so not having one puts you at a distinct disadvantage.

Editing is advantageous

- A native-English speaker requiring **academic publication** will usually choose editing. Although some academics and students are confident writers, [professional editing](#) can still provide great benefit. As described above, editing improves writing quality, which ensures that your arguments—the original insights you spent significant energy and time developing—are expressed in a clear and compelling way. Academic editing also involves an editor checking your conformity with style and formatting conventions. Quality writing and absolute adherence to academic conventions are two cornerstones of successful academic publishing.
- A **business** may choose [editing or proofreading](#), depending on the document and its level of importance. The standard of communication defines the identity of a business, with quality writing signifying competence and professionalism. If the author of the document is not a confident writer, or if multiple authors have had an (often inconsistent) input, then editing is highly advantageous.

Proofreading is appropriate

- **Students and academics** who are confident writers, and have self-edited, may only require [proofreading](#) to eliminate surface errors. The writing itself should already be publication quality, with proofreading ensuring the removal of mistakes, inconsistencies and academic-specific abnormalities that can detract from the end-product.
- **Book authors** who have already received professional editing usually benefit from a final proofread to publish with absolute confidence. Although some authors may balk at the prospect of paying for [book proofreading](#) after the book has already been professionally edited, the reality is that just a few errors can detract from the reading experience and ensure it does not reach its potential. A litany of surface errors, needless to say, will be fatal dagger in the heart of any author.
- Some **businesses** may just require a mistake-free document, rather than the quality of writing to be optimised. Again, much will depend on the type of document and its level of importance to the company.

About The Expert Editor

The Expert Editor provides editing and proofreading services to a diverse range of clients in Australia and overseas, including students, academics, authors and businesses.

