The Three Types of Editing: Which Does Your Manuscript Need?

*Should You Hire an Editor for Proofreading, Line Editing or Substantive Editing?*

Many writers hire professional editors to go over their manuscripts before submission.

This is especially true during the preliminary stages of a writer's career because every grammatical error and spelling mistake can mean a rejection letter.

What you might not know, however, is that there are three basic types of editing, and you'll need to determine which of these your writing needs.

Although major organizations like newspapers may hire people specifically for things like fact checking, and plagiarism concerns, most editing efforts are lumped into three generic categories that contain those elements.

Of course, if you need specific things like background research, technical interviews, and other related areas, you should be prepared to pay extra for those efforts since they are outside of the normal prevue of what is considered by the trade as an editing effort.

**Proofreading**

The first type of editing for which you might hire an editor is proofreading. This is the simplest form of editing and is also usually the cheapest.

Proofreading is for writers who don't need help with sentence structure or the content of the book itself, but need someone to simply go over the text for basic grammatical and spelling errors.

The purpose of proofreading is to have someone who has never read your manuscript go over each word for errors that might have escaped your attention, which will happen at least a few times in a full-length manuscript.

**Line Editing**

The second type of editing most editors' offer is line editing, which is a little more detailed than proofreading.
If your manuscript has plot holes, limited characterization, factual errors or syntactical problems, line editing is probably more your style.

It costs more than proofreading, but a manuscript with structural errors won't get past a literary agent or publisher.

The purpose of line editing is to tie together loose ends in your manuscript and to make sure that the story flows properly.

For non-fiction, line editing will catch factual errors and will also help to separate chapters and paragraphs so that they make more sense.

**Substantive Editing**

The final service most editors' offer is substantive editing, which is even more detailed than line editing and involves the rearranging, deleting, adding and rewording of entire pages and chapters.

Some editors call substantive editing a "Ghostwriting/Editing Blend".

**What Type of Editing Does Your Manuscript Need?**

When your manuscript is finished and ready to be shipped off to an editor, it is best to have an idea for the type of editing required.

To help you determine what type of editing your manuscript needs - proofreading, line editing or substantive editing - use the following questions:

1. **Has your manuscript been rejected before for substantive reasons?**

   If you have a drawer full of rejection letters from agents or persons whose opinion you respect which basically say the same things - underdeveloped plot, poorly developed characters, etc. - then you might want to consider substantive editing.

   The editor can help with your manuscript as a whole and make the necessary adjustments.

2. **Do you find that your major flaw is in spelling and grammar?**

   If you are able to craft wonderful plots and characters, but your grammar needs a bit of work, consider requesting proofreading only.
This will leave the syntax of your story intact, but will correct the grammatical and spelling errors.

3. **Does your dialogue sound stilted and forced?**

One of the major points that line editing focuses on is dialogue. The editor will tweak your characters' words until they sound natural.

If dialogue is your only issue, line editing will probably be your best bet.

**Recap**

As a writer, regardless of the type, style, genre, or subject of your material, who is contemplating purchasing editing services, you need to review the three types of editing carefully.

As you do, you'll observe that with each successive level, there is a lot more work involved than the previous level.

Consequently, you should anticipate spending more money and having the effort take more time with each successive level.