

reheated and left to cool. She  
WED with the effort of holding  
into the stall well she came out  
in the heat of the summer  
stand the stenoh  
It would explain how, since she  
if the morning  
sweet top note of rot.  
she had ever felt before.  
m for a while. There was a lot  
regard. Waiting to be served  
that of - in his sixties perhaps.  
drink. Sometimes  
now she was convinced that any  
dead body. The woman on the  
red her the matter would be treated  
I seen Jim? It might have  
re loft insulated. The loft had late

# Words are everywhere

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## Is your content ready for editing?

**Otherwise, known as 'the Editor is having a small breakdown after managing to turn this round quickly only to find another version waiting in their in box because the contributor thought he would make a few more changes...'**

### Editor's are obsessed with final copy because...

The copyedit cannot start until we receive final copy. The importance of this stage in the publishing process cannot be overemphasised. This is the last stage when you (the contributor or writer) can make substantive changes to your content. If you are not sure about how something is worded, whether figures are correct or you have permission to reproduce a table, now is the time to check. After this point the only corrections permitted are to errors introduced in the typesetting process.

Note: if you have even the slightest doubt that the content might change **do not** submit it. Wait until you are confident that it is the final version and there will be no further changes. Changes made after this stage, no matter how small, are the commonest cause of delays. Editors would prefer to reschedule late copy than to start work on copy that may be replaced or updated.

### And copyediting is what exactly?

Copyediting is one step in the process of turning content into a published product (either printed or online, such as a website). Copyeditors are the writer's second pair of eyes.

**Copyediting** includes editing for correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation; consistent use of capitalization, compounding, hyphenation, and symbols; and checking for internal consistency of information.

**Copyediting** differs from so-called *substantive editing* in that the goal of the copy editor is to avoid changing the original text any more than necessary. Copyeditors do not generally make heavy-handed changes to an author's work. Instead, the goal is to correct the obvious problems, make the text readable, and preserve the author's 'voice' (which is their own unique way of expressing themselves).

A copyeditor is concerned with the 4Cs – clarity, coherency, consistency and correctness - in service of the Cardinal C: communication. The main tasks concern:

### Missing bits

The copyeditor checks that nothing is missing: is the diagram mentioned on page six included? Do the hyperlinks to other web pages work?

They will also check the structure: Is anything missing or redundant? Is the order logical? Headings break up text and make it more readable: are there enough of them? If there are more than four levels of sub-headings, the structure probably needs to be rethought. Are footnotes essential? Could 'supporting material' go into an appendix? Is a bibliography necessary?



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**Sentence and paragraph length** This is dependent on the readership, the type of copy and how the copy is going to be read (e.g. in a book or on a computer screen). In general, however, sentences should be kept short or at least uncomplicated, and new paragraphs should introduce new ideas and help break up a page. Typesetting may change line length, and the copy-editor will know what to do to compensate for this.

### Language

The copyeditor simplifies the grammar and corrects errors or lapses in syntax, usage and diction.

This rules are subjective – it's open to interpretation by the copyeditor. Copyeditors correct anything that may confuse, distract or disturb the reader. But copyeditors do not impose their own taste and style. A good copyeditor will not change the meaning and their hand will be invisible – the reader should not know where the copyeditor has worked on the text.

### Style

Look at these two examples:

#### *Fruit for Thought*

The proportion of severely obese 12 year olds in Scotland is more than five times the UK average, according to NHS statistics issued by NPMW. Some 20% of those aged 3 and a half were overweight.

#### *Fruit for Thought*

The proportion of severely obese 12-year-olds in Scotland is more than five times the United Kingdom average, according to the National Programme for Mental Wellbeing statistics. Some 20 per cent of those aged three-and-a-half were overweight.

Which is correct? 12-year-olds or 12 year olds? 20% or 20 per cent? Both are grammatically correct. Only one is correct depending on your house style. If you don't have a house style, don't worry. The copyeditor will make it consistent with a default style (for example, open punctuation may be used, with minimal capitalisation). The copyeditor makes sure the content is consistent.

Copy editing is not just about dotting Is and crossing Ts. Editors also tackle the following:

### Style

George Orwell's six rules – contained in his *Politics and the English Language* (1946) – are a good starting point:

1. Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech that you are used to seeing in print.
2. Never use a long word where a short one will do.
3. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.



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4. Never use the passive where you can use the active.
5. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
6. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

Common mistakes – which an experienced copy-editor will be able to deal with efficiently – include:

- the overuse of exclamation marks and emphasis, in italic, bold or capitals
- very long sentences with little punctuation
- very long paragraphs
- changing between the first and the third person for no good reason.

## Levels of copyediting

If time and money were not an issue, an editor would linger over every word until they were satisfied with the clarity, coherency, consistency and correctness. But since time and money are an issue, the editor has to prioritise and decide on the level of copyediting – light, medium and heavy.

The level of copyediting is based on

- the quality of the writer's work
- the intended audience
- the schedule and budget for editing and publication.

Agreement on the level of copyediting will help manage your expectations for your project – compromises are necessary. For example, the submitted copy may be poorly written but time and budget only allows for a light copyedit.

### Light

- Ensure consistency – spelling, capitalisation, punctuation, hyphenation, abbreviations, formats of lists.
- Check contents page against chapters, check numbering of footnotes or endnotes, tables and figures.

### Medium

The above plus:

- Query any facts that seem incorrect. Use reference books and the Internet, to verify content.
- Query faulty gaps in logic.



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- Point out any patches that seem wordy or convoluted, and supply suggested revisions.

## Heavy

The above plus:

- Ask for or supply definitions of terms likely to be new to readers.
- Rewrite any wordy or convoluted patch.
- Verify and revise any facts that are incorrect.
- Query or fix faulty gaps in logic.

## The difference between copyediting and proofreading

Copyeditors work on the manuscript and correct structural issues; iron out grammar, usage and diction; impose consistency of tone and language. Proofreaders, in contrast, correct errors introduced during the typesetting.

In simple terms: Copyeditors work on the manuscript before it goes to be typeset within the design. They will be working on-screen.

Proofreaders work on the proofs after it has gone to design – marking up the hard copy in red pen.

*Content derived from several sources including the Society of Editors and Proofreaders and The Copyeditor's Handbook by Amy Einsohn.*