

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

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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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