

Editing: Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Proofreaders, copyeditors, ghostwriters, book doctors—what's the difference?

A: A lot of people are responsible for the content of a great book. And while their duties may cross-over at times, they each play a specific role. Here's a brief explanation for each, in the order you would use their service:

Ghostwriter: Say you have an idea, but you don't know how (or simply haven't the time) to get it down on paper. That's when you call in a ghostwriter. You provide the idea, lay the groundwork, and the ghostwriter writes. When it's all said and done—voila!—you're an author.

Book doctor: Editors of old use to have time to do it all. They would read through your manuscript, and thoroughly inspect it for serious issues in all areas—from content and structure to plot and characterization. Then they would offer suggestions for resolving said issues, maybe even rewrite a bit or two. Today, if you wish to have your manuscript thoroughly worked over, you'll need to hire a book doctor—the middleman between ghostwriter and editor.

Editor: "Editor" has a tendency to be bantered about willy-nilly; the truth is there are several types of editors, including:

- **Acquisitions editor:** is responsible for acquiring new books for a publishing house. An acquisitions editor is all about the business of books.
- **Copy editor:** edits manuscripts line by line to ensure correct grammar, spelling and punctuation, as well as consistencies. A copy editor is all about the details.
- **Structural editor:** focuses on the structure of the book, ensuring it's ordered correctly and flows as it should. A structural editor is all about the big picture.

Proofreader: Finally, the proofreader. A proofreader's job is to alleviate errors, be it typos, misspellings, conflicting tenses, grammatical mistakes, odd sentence structures, incorrect punctuation, and differing fonts and text. You'll want a professional proofreader to look over the manuscript immediately prior to print, and any time there are changes to layout or typesetting.

Q: Why do I need a book editor?

A: The question you should be asking: *why wouldn't I need a book editor?* After all, every writer needs an extra pair of eyes. Burning the midnight oil can make you

loopy, your brain knows what you meant to write, you know something's off, but you can't quite put your finger on it—there are myriad reasons.

And let's face it—you only have one chance to make a first impression.

A book editor helps you put your best foot forward, right from the beginning—helping you reel readers in ... and keep them coming back for more.

Q: Should I copyright my manuscript before sending it out?

A: Only if it you'd like the added peace of mind. According to the U.S. Copyright Office, "your work is under copyright protection the moment it is created and fixed in a tangible form that is perceptible either directly or with the aid of a machine or device." In other words, you write it down, it's yours.

Check out their website for more copyright information, copyright.gov/faq.html

Q: What can I expect when you edit by book?

A: I provide both copy and structural editing for your electronic or hard copy manuscript. Upon receipt, I will send an email confirmation, and turnaround time.

- **Electronic copies:** Unless you request otherwise, I fix minor typos, misspellings, etc. without the use of track changes. This keeps your manuscript from looking like something was butchered upon it. If a minor edit is repeated, I will either make note of it or track changes so you can remedy the issue in the future.

For the first round I typically add substantial comments—with items to be addressed in your revision. I'll also highlight any significant changes and my reasoning behind said changes.

There are times when I add text within the manuscript—heading and transition placeholders, for instance. Such text will be red and noted so you are aware of the change and can rewrite as needed. [Note: most often this is for informational manuscripts]

- **Hard copies:** In addition to marks within the manuscript, I will type up a detailed report covering issues found and suggested fixes. Hard copies require an additional fee due to additional time and postage expense.

Please note, I consider our work a partnership. As editor, it's not my job to do the work for you ... but to help you write your best work.

Q: Do you offer general manuscript evaluations prior to a complete edit?

A: No, no I do not. Nor do I recommend them. After all, a general evaluation boils down to an opinion—and that will do nothing to strengthen your writing, improve your chances at publication, or draw readers in.

I will, however, provide a sample edit on your first chapter. This will at least give you an idea of how I work, and if I will be a good fit for your editing needs.

Q: Do you have any writing tips?

A: Naturally ...

- **Know thy reader.** Who are they? What are they looking for? What do they want; what are their hopes and dreams? What do they fear?
- **Show, don't tell.** Your words should paint a picture, not club readers over the head with a long list of facts and figures.
- **DON'T YELL.** It may be expected in social media, but it's frowned upon in the publishing world. Rest assured—there are still ways to get urgency across.
- **Read out loud.** If your writing reads aloud smoothly, you're golden; if it's hard to read or clumsy, keep tinkering. Seriously, works like magic.
- **Meet with other writers.** Join a writers' group, or hook up with other authors. Not only is it inspiring, they can keep you motivated, keep you accountable, and help you brainstorm.
- **Keep reading.** Read everything and read often. Read for the enjoyment and read to learn. What do you love? What do you hate? Then keep those things in mind when it's time to write your own book.
- **Keep writing.** Write every day. Practice does make perfect you know.

Q: Why would an author need a copywriter?

A: Time is a big factor—you just don't have time to write web content, speeches, press releases, articles, and email blasts.

Branding is another. You may not realize it, but as a published author you are a brand. The more successful you are, the more important it is that your "brand," i.e. your voice, is consistent in everything you publish.

Q: Why would I need a proofreader after you edit my manuscript?

A: First off, I specialize in copy and structural editing. Yes, I do catch typos and grammatical errors—but I'm more focused on how your book reads. Secondly, a proofreader typically comes on the scene once the book has been formatted—so she will check for formatting issues as well. Finally, it's always good to have at least a couple sets of eyes when it comes to typos.

Q: What's this "Author Coaching" business?

A: Sometimes authors need a little extra "oomph" to get them going. When you're ready to take the next step—but just aren't sure you have the strength to do it—an Author Coach can help.

As your coach, we'd meet one to four times per month (depending on the level of support desired)—in person or via video conferencing.

Then, through advice, guidance, instruction—and even a little encouragement—I'll help you:

- Set clear, focused actions for achieving your writing goals;
- Develop regular writing assignments;
- Brainstorm chapters, plot, characterization, dialogue;
- Stay accountable.

In other words, I help you take your writing to the next level ... so today can become that elusive "someday"...

Q: Should I hire you?

A: Maybe, maybe not.

It's important to hire a professional writer/editor that you feel comfortable working with—as well as someone who has your best interest at heart.

So here are a few things about me ...

- I'm an English Major, with a writing emphasis—I read and write ... a lot. I know the English language, but I also know what makes a great story.
- I read a little of everything, but I lean toward mystery, fantasy, literary fiction, and nonfiction.
- With a foundation in marketing/sales, I do more than use proper sentence structure and correct grammar—I write with the audience in mind.
- Nearly every full-time position I've held, had an aspect of confidentiality. Mum's the word with me—unless you want me to shout it from the rooftops, then I can do that too.
- When working on project, I consider myself part of the team—your success is my success.

If that sounds like a good fit for your writing needs, great—let's get together and discuss your project!

Q: If you accept my manuscript, will you farm editing out to another editor?

A: If I accept your project, I will be the only editor working on your manuscript.

There are times, however, when I suggest the use of fellow editors. In such cases, it will be your call whether or not to employ their services.

Q: What is your turnaround time?

A: Depends on the scope of your project. Typically, a small manuscript (less than 50,000 words) will take a couple weeks; an average sized manuscript (approximately 90,000 words) will take about a month.

Projects are accepted on a first come, first served basis. If I am unable to complete your project within your required time constraint, I can direct you to another editor who might be able to help.

Q: How much do you charge for editing/book doctoring/ghostwriting services?

A: Again, it depends on the scope of your project.

The average quote ranges from 1 to 5 cents per word, depending on the level of editing required, turnaround time, and complexity of the subject matter.

If you email me specifics (including a sample chapter)—total word count, type of editing required, and required turnaround time—I'll be happy to send a detailed bid letter.

Q: What is your payment policy?

A: I require at least half payment up front, with the remainder due upon completion of manuscript edit. PayPal is the preferred payment method; other payment options include money orders or wire transfers. I will accept personal checks; however, I must accept total payment up front and will not begin work until the check has cleared.

Q: I don't have money right now, but I'll give you a portion of the profits. Is that okay?

A: No, no it is not. In the publishing world, we call that "on spec"—on speculation. Since there are no guarantees in the publishing world, asking me to do a project on spec is like asking me to do a project for free. I simply cannot afford to do that.

Q: What's the best way to reach you?

A: I truly focus on the project at hand; if I am with another client, I do not always answer my phone. That said: email is the best way to reach me. You can use my online contact form at www.ajbwriting.com or simply email at amy{at}ajbwriting{dot}com.