

# THE WRITING & EDITING PROCESS FOR SELF-PUBLISHERS

During my time as an editor, I've often received queries from newer writers who are unsure of how to go about the writing process, or how editing works. At what stage in the writing process should a writer seek out an editor? What does the editor actually do? What kind of editing do they need and what does that mean? So, I decided to consolidate my answers to these queries, in the hope that it will help newer writers get some answers.

What I've done is to chronologically describe the ideal process that a writer would follow, as I understand it. As with any pursuit, some writers may follow a slightly different process. Also, for simplicity's sake, some steps are a little more condensed than others. Thanks for reading and I hope you find this helpful!

*(Note: while this process applies to self-publishing authors, much of it can also be applied to the writing/editing process for authors seeking publication by other routes. However, as there are several different pathways to publication these days, and most of the authors I'm in contact with are self-publishing, I decided to focus on the self-publishing route.)*

**Step 1** Writer drafts their story (first draft stage).



**Step 2** Writer sets their manuscript aside for a period of time (this is important in order to gain perspective on the writing and story).



**Step 3** Writer redrafts their story however many times they deem necessary (subsequent drafting stage).



**Step 4** Writer enlists critique partner/critique group to read the story and provide initial feedback.



**Step 5** Writer redrafts their story in light of initial feedback and, ideally, sets the manuscript aside again for a period of time.



**Step 6** Rinse and repeat steps 4 and 5 as necessary.



**Step 7** Once the writer is satisfied that they can't do anything more with the manuscript on their own (even with the help of their critique group/critique partner), they may wish to send their manuscript to one or more beta readers for more general reader feedback. (Note: depending on the author's background and what/who they're writing about, they may also benefit from engaging an [authenticity reader](#) at about this point in the process. An authenticity read is like a beta read, but the reader is analysing the authenticity of the plot, characterisation, setting, dialogue and so on.) As with the above steps, the writer may wish to go through more than one round with a beta reader/s. For writers who choose not to work with beta readers, skip to the next step (below).



**Developmental editing** Once the writer can no longer do any more with the manuscript on their own, they may choose to work with a developmental editor. A developmental editor looks at all aspects of story: plot, pacing, characterisation, structure, etc. and whether they are used effectively within the book in question. Crucially, a developmental editor will not only show a writer where the story isn't quite working (and why), they will also provide guidance on how to make it more effective and compelling.

Sometimes, a developmental editor may also help a writer to develop their ideas in relation to a book or story. For example, through an outline edit, brainstorming sessions or coaching/mentoring.



**Developmental editing, 1, preliminary steps** The first step is for the writer to find an editor they get on with who is interested in their project, available, within the range of their budget and who has experience of working with their chosen genre. For general information on what editing costs, see the [Chartered Institute of Editing and Proofreading](#) in the UK and the [Editorial Freelancers Association](#) in the US.



**Developmental editing, 2, manuscript assessment** Once the writer and editor agree they'd like to work together, the editor will conduct what's called a manuscript assessment. This means that the editor will need to see the entire manuscript so that they can read a chapter or two from the beginning, middle and end of it. This will give them an idea of how much feedback the writer will likely need from them and therefore how much of their time will be needed for the project. This will allow them to provide the writer with a fair quote for the work.



**Developmental editing, 3, starting work** Once a fee and schedule has been agreed upon, the editor will start work on the manuscript. Developmental editing usually involves a minimum of two reads or 'passes', depending on what the editor feels is necessary for any particular manuscript.



**Developmental editing, the first pass** The first pass usually involves a 'quick read' where the editor reads through the story much as a reader would. However, unlike a reader would, they will often correct any egregious errors as they read, such as typos or formatting inconsistencies, as well as making notes to themselves about any potential issues to follow up on later in the editing process. At the end of this stage the editor will make notes on any strengths, weaknesses and inconsistencies they encounter in the work.



**Developmental editing, interlude** After the initial read through/pass, the editor will usually set the manuscript aside for a brief period in order to reflect on their reading experience. This step usually involves the editor making yet more notes to themselves on the story and characters, brainstorming about why any weaknesses in the story might be occurring and considering how the author might solve them. This is where the editor starts to get 'under the skin' of the story, so to speak.



Sometimes the editor will decide that they need to dig deeper into the story in order to determine why it's not quite working as the author would seem to have intended. This may involve the editor reading the story again, more closely, or carrying out additional editorial tasks such as book mapping or a reverse outline (for more on this, see my [post about book mapping](#)). It could also involve the editor writing a synopsis for the story that's there. (This is different from an author's synopsis which may or may not accurately reflect what's on the page as the author may be too close to the work to tell the difference between what they've written and what they intended to write.)



**Developmental editing, final pass** Once this reflection has been accomplished and the editor has a good idea of where the author is going off track with the story, why and how they might get back on track, the developmental editor goes back to the manuscript and begins their final pass. This involves showing the author where any weaknesses in their story are occurring, why these parts of the story aren't working and providing the writer with suggestions (where possible) as to how they might strengthen these areas. These suggestions might be given in comments on the manuscript itself or in the revision letter/report produced at the end.

After this final pass has been done, the editor then summarises their thoughts in a revision letter. This letter ties their feedback together and provides a brief overview of where the main weaknesses are occurring and how the writer might strengthen those areas. In other words, the letter will help to guide the writer's revision and serve as a roadmap during their redrafting process.



**Developmental editing, wrap-up** Once the developmental edit is finished, the manuscript goes back to the author with the editor's suggested changes, comments and revision letter. The author then takes the time to read through and digest everything. After digesting the feedback, the author may wish to discuss the edit with the editor. For example, they may have questions about the edit itself or how to move forward with their next draft. Most editors factor some discussion time into the cost of an edit. Even if they don't, or the author needs more of the editor's time, this is usually easy to arrange.



Once the author has taken the time to digest the editorial feedback they've been given, and discussed any questions they have with their editor, it's time to consider what changes they might want to make and redraft the story.



After the author has redrafted their work, set it aside again for a period of time and reread it, they may then choose to undergo additional rounds of developmental editing. Additional rounds of editing are often less time intensive and therefore not as costly, but this depends on the manuscript and how it may have changed and grown.



After all of the developmental editing and associated rewriting has been completed, an author may choose from among various different publishing pathways, depending on what their intentions are for the work. As mentioned at the beginning, I'll be focusing on the self-publishing pathway.

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## Self-publishing

If an author is looking to self-publish, it's highly recommended that further rounds of editing are undertaken, in order to ensure that the text is as strong as it can be.

*Remember: developmental editing looks at character, pacing and plot predominantly. Although a developmental editor may also spot grammatical inconsistencies and misspellings, a developmental edit is not a copy-edit or a proofread!*



**Line editing** After developmental editing an author may wish to have line editing carried out. Line editing looks at the writing on a line by line and paragraph by paragraph level. This stage of editing is all about the language and ensuring that the work reads well. A good line editor can help an author to polish their voice. Note: a full developmental edit may include some line editing.



**Copy-editing** A copy editor is concerned with grammar, spelling and punctuation. They will ensure your writing is correct and free of technical errors. This is an important step towards creating a professional product that your readers will value.



**Proofreading** A final check of the work, prior to publishing. A proofreader corrects formatting inconsistencies, typos and other errors that have made it through to this late stage. (Note: if the author is working with a typesetter/formatter then proofreading should happen after all their pages have been laid out as they will appear in the published book itself.)



Once all of these steps have been carried out satisfactorily, the story is ready for publishing. Congratulations!