

# SUE SHADE – FREELANCE FICTION EDITOR – T/A SHADENET PUBLISHING

## THE EDITING PROCESS

### TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING & OTHER METHODS

Up until about ten years ago, a writer who wished to publish a novel would generally submit their manuscript to a literary agent, whose job it was to place the story with a mainstream publisher.

Where a story was accepted, all of the hard work required in the production and selling of the book was carried out by the publishing company. That's the *editing, cover design, typesetting, proofreading, printing, marketing* and *distribution*. (It's worth noting that book production can take quite a long time: anything from six months to a year for a novel to be published.)

Where a story was rejected, the writer – generally – had one other option: vanity publishing. This meant that the writer paid to have a book printed and published, usually at great cost. Vanity publishing, back then, earned itself a bad reputation as it became associated with a lack of editing. Often, but not always, books would be printed, for public consumption, with all sorts of errors and inconsistencies.

Today, traditional publishing obviously still exists, but writers can choose alternatives to see their work in print: independent publishing (where someone else is paid to do all of the hard work) or self-publishing (where the writer is responsible for carrying out, or paying to carry out, all of the hard work!) Independent publishing is essentially the modern equivalent of vanity publishing, but services have improved as writers become more knowledgeable about the publishing process.

In any event, it is vital to have a novel professionally produced, as a traditional publisher would, as far as possible, even if it means paying for the necessary stages of production to be carried out. The first stage is *editing*.

Because professional editing had always taken place behind the closed doors of the publishing companies, it is something that some writers have still not yet fully grasped. Some believe that editing is simply a check of spelling, punctuation, and grammar; whilst others believe it is a process similar to that which they undertake themselves when crafting their story. It is much more complex. Simply put, professional editing involves 'translating' a writer's text so it can be understood by the reader.

There are three stages of professional editing: *structural editing, copy-editing, and proofreading*. Each is a separate stage that is carried out on a manuscript, in that order. Each is briefly explained below.

### STRUCTURAL EDITING

Structural editing (also known as 'developmental editing') is all about the bigger picture. A structural edit involves at least one read through of a manuscript, in order to understand the whole story and make sense of all the parts. The following aspects of the text are included in the analysis:

- character creation (unique, developed, motivated, realistic)
- dialogue mechanics (effective wordage, action tags, adverb use)
- narrative voice (first or third person – or even second!)
- pace (too fast, too slow, reader's interest needs to be held)
- plot and structure (coherent, organised, including timeline)
- point of view (from whose perspective is the story being told?)
- tense (past, present, mixture)
- writing style (author's way of writing)

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If there are any major issues with the above (and there usually are!), then the writer will need to correct these. If the editor did the work, they would impose their own writing style into the writer's story, which could then be noticed by the readers. Besides, it is the writer's job to write the story!

Once structural editing has been carried out, and the manuscript has been revised as required, then *copy-editing* can take place.

#### **COPY-EDITING**

Copy-editing is about checking the individual elements that make up the story. Spelling, punctuation, and grammar are included at this level, but it also takes into account the following:

- the placement of chapter breaks
- checking the consistency and relevance of detail
- continuity problems
- copyright and libel
- errors of fact (including anachronisms)
- loose plot ends
- repetition of text
- similarity of names
- unusual spelling or usage

At the copy-editing stage, no major rewriting should be required, but there may be smaller revisions to be made, perhaps to a paragraph, a sentence, or even individual word choice.

In traditional publishing, after copy-editing has been completed, the manuscript is typeset. This means formatting the original document layout to how the pages will display in printed form. After typesetting, a proof copy is produced, and this is used for the final stage of editing: *proofreading*.

#### **PROOFREADING**

At this stage, the main editorial process is complete, so proofreading is less about checking the story content and structure, and more about checking for mistakes that have been made during the typesetting process.

A proofreader will check the text for typographical mistakes, and general spelling and punctuation errors. They will look for any discrepancies in the way the text has been laid out on the page, but will also keep an eye out for any small inconsistencies that may still exist in the story – generally, anything that doesn't make sense.

In traditional publishing, proofreading may take place several times, until everyone involved feels that no more can be done. Then the proofs are passed for press and the book goes on to be printed.

By adapting the traditional method of publishing, I offer structural editing, copy-editing, and proofreading at the relevant stages.